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FAIR GIRLS AND GRAY HORSES

FAIR GIRLS
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BY

WILL H. OGILVIE

AUTHOR OF "HEARTS OF GOLD"

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To HUGH GORDON

For sake of the meet and the muster,
The hunts in the oak-scrub and plain;
For sake of the old days, whose lustre
May never shine round us again;
In mind of the head-rope and halter,
The mounts in the dawn and the dew,
I lay my poor gift on the altar
Of friendship, and pledge it to You!

W. H. O.

Of the following verses, "Life has wreaths of each hue," "Gold Tresses," "The Old Boat," "The World Beyond," "Ballade of Windy Nights," and "To the Overlanders" are first printed in this volume. "The Land of Dumb Despair" was published as introductory to "Where the Dead Men Lie, and Other Poems," by Barcroft Boake. Most of the others originally appeared in The Bulletin, *and some in* The Australasian, The Sydney Mail, The Critic (*Adelaide*), The Western Champion *and* The Independent (*Parkes, N.S.W.*), The Border Watch (*Mount Gambier, S.A.*), The Australasian Pastoralists' Review, *and* The Kelso Mail (*Scotland*).

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FAIR GIRLS AND GRAY HORSES!

Fair Girls and Gray Horses! A toast for you
Who never went wide of a fence or a kiss:
While horses are horses and eyes are blue
There is never a toast in the world like this!

To all Fair Girls! For the sake of one
Whose bright blue eyes were awhile my star,
Whose hair had the rich red gold of the Sun
When his kisses fall where the leaf lips are!
To all Fair Girls! How the red wine gleams
To the glass's rim as it gleamed that night
In the jewelled hand of my Dame of Dreams—
O, jewelled fingers so soft and white!
To all Fair Girls! Turn your glasses down.
Here's "Blissful bridals and long to live!"
And if I am slighting your eyes of brown,
O, Gipsies Born of the Night, forgive!

To all Gray Horses! Fill up again
For the sake of a gray horse dear to me;
For a foam-fed bit and a snatching rein
And a reaching galloper fast and free!
To all Gray Horses! For one steed's sake
Who has carried me many a journey tall
In the dawn-mists dim when the magpies wake,
In the starry haze when the night-dews fall!
To all Gray Horses! Now drink you deep,
For red wine ruins no rider's nerves:
"Light work and a long, long after-sleep!"
As each gray horse in the world deserves.

Fair Girls and Gray Horses! To each his way,
But golden and gray are the loves to hold;
And if gold tresses must turn to gray
Gray horses need never be turned into gold!

LIBRARY.

CONTENTS

PAGE

LEILA

The nodding plumes steal slowly by ; - 1

DRAY-DREAMS

O the mountains speak of sadness ! - 3

"POUR PASSER . . ."

No sweep of hill or valley, - - - 6

GOLD TRESSES

You stand at my knee, Gold Tresses ! - 8

A BROKEN WEB

A spider floated a silken thread - 10

THE TOWNSHIP LIGHTS

With laughter and love-spells and witch-eyes of blue - - - - - 12

PAGE

THE PARTING

There were trailing roses behind her - 14

"PERHAPS TO-NIGHT——!"

"Perhaps to-night——!" came flashing through the splendour - - - 16

TO A MISOGYNIST

You damn all women as wantons or worse 17

WHEN HORSES ARE SADDLED FOR LOVE

The saddle-slaves of Love are we - - 19

STAR AND STAR

You have crossed my life with your fair sweet face; - - - - - 22

TO-DAY!

Hear me now! for Time is flying, - - 24

HIS GIPPSLAND GIRL

Now, money was scarce and work was slack - - - - - - 26

WHISPER LOW

We have rowed together at even-fall - 29

PAGE

A TELL-TALE TRYST
O, who was it saddled White Star last night, - - - - - - 31

GOOD-BYE, LYNETTE!
I have worked for you—toil made sweet, love! - - - - - - 33

IN MULGA TOWN
We played at love in Mulga town, - 35

THE OLD BOAT
The Old Boat lies in the sand and slime 37

LOVE'S MOLOCH
How long shall we hear the sobbing? - 39

WHERE THE BRUMBIES COME TO WATER
There's a lonely grave half-hidden where the blue-grass droops above, - - 42

GOOD-BYE
Here on the broken strings of Love's mute harp, - - - - - 45

FROM THE GULF
Store cattle from Nelanjie! The mob goes feeding past, - - - - 49

PAGE
THE RIDING OF THE REBEL
He was the Red Creek overseer, a trusted man and true, - - - - - 54

FOUR-IN-HAND
O some prefer a single, - - - 61

THE STOCKYARD LIAR
If ever you're handling a rough one - 63

THE BORDER GATE
Dawn gilds the spiders' bridges; - - 66

OUTLAWS BOTH
Steady! steady, my pearl! from the crest of the range - - - - - 69

THE COACH OF DEATH
There's a phantom-coach runs nightly along the Western creeks; - - 72

DARRELL
So I've taken his hundred notes in the end, - - - - - 77

OFF THE GRASS
They were boasting on the Greenhide of their nags of fancy breed, - - - 79

PAGE

HIS EPITAPH
On a little old bush racecourse at the back of No Man's Land, - - 84

THE DINGO OF BRIGALOW GAP
For K.G. or coronet, kingdom or crown, 87

HOW THE CHESTNUT HORSE CAME HOME
Twenty miles across the ranges there's a patch of cane-grass clears - - 91

A DRAFT FROM TRINGADEE
Lead me down to the stockyard, Jim, to the butt of the old box-tree! - - 95

TAKEN OVER
The Banks are taking charge, old man!— I knew how it would be; - - - 99

THE STATION BRAND
Ho! you in the boots and the long-necked spurs, - - - - - - 103

OUT OF THE CHAINS
He has toiled in his place since the break of day, - - - - - - 106

PAGE

THE MAN WHO STEADIES THE LEAD
He was born in the light of red oaths - 109

HOW THE FIRE QUEEN CROSSED THE SWAMP
The flood was down in the Wilga swamps, three feet over the mud, - - 113

THE NEAR-SIDE LEADER
When the gear is on the horses and the knotted trace-chains hooked ; - - 118

THE SILENT SQUADRON
Down the long dream-lanes - - - 123

THE BROKEN SHOE
Long years ago—no matter now how long—one fierce December - - - 125

RIDERLESS
A broken bridle trailing, - - - 135

KINGS OF THE EARTH
We are heathen who worship an idol - 137

UNBROKEN !
Eyes wild with fear unspoken, - - 139

PAGE

HOW WE WON THE RIBBON
Come and look around my office— - - 142

HABET!
Down! And the world's war-squadron splashes - - - - - - - 151

THE WORLD BEYOND
A Poet stood in the red day-dawn, - - 153

NORTHWARD TO THE SHEDS
There's a whisper from the regions out beyond the Barwon banks; - - - - 155

LIFE'S OVERLAND
Grey-lying miles to the nor'ward of Nor'ward, - - - - - - 158

AT THE BACK O' BOURKE!
Where the mulga paddocks are wild and wide, - - - - - - 161

THE SONG OF SONGS
Let others chant of battle and such wreaths as Glory gave; - - - 164

AT THE BEND O' THE CREEK
Here is roaring flood in Winter - - 166

PAGE

WEST OF THE WORLD
West of the World all red suns sleep - 169

A SCOTCH NIGHT
If you chance to strike a gathering of half-a-dozen friends - - - - 170

"ABSENT FRIENDS!"
"Absent Friends!" There are brought to our mind again - - - - - 174

THE MARCH OF THE FLOOD
There's a whisper away on the Queensland side - - - - - - 176

"GOD SPEED!"
Because we've waked the morning-stars - 180

A WIND FROM THE WEST
The Wind that fires the blood - - 182

ABANDONED SELECTIONS
On the crimson breast of the sunset - 184

"THE MEN WHO BLAZED THE TRACK!"
Since the toasts for the absent are over, - 188

VITA BREVIS
Our Life is but a moment: - - - 191

PAGE

THE TRUEST FRIEND
I had a comrade tried and true, - - 193

AULD LANG SYNE
O, it's southward from Southampton ! and she takes the Channel gay, - - - 194

IN TOWN
Where the smoke-clouds scarcely drift - 198

BEYOND COOLGARDIE
They are fighting beyond Coolgardie, dusty and worn and brown, - - 200

DESERTED
This is the homestead—the still lagoon - 202

THE FILLING OF THE SWAMPS
Hurrah for the storm-clouds sweeping ! - 204

BLACK SHEEP
They shepherd their Black Sheep down to the ships, - - - - - - 206

THE COMING HOME
The light we follow through a mist of tears 208

PAGE

THE WALLABY TRACK
O a weird, wild road is the Wallaby Track - - - - - - - 210

BEYOND THE BARRIER
Are you tired of the South Land, comrade — - - - - - - 212

RAINBOWS AND WITCHES
I remember, ever so long ago, - - 215

HANDICAPPED!
Life's race for all is even-lapped - - 218

MEMORY TOWN
From dawning to dusk moves the crowd in her street - - - - - 220

TO A BUNCH OF HEATHER
Was it early in the autumn, was it sunny summer weather? - - - - 222

THE FRONT RANK
We fight on far tracks unknown; - - 225

THE NEW MOON
"New Moon to-night!" you will hear them say, - - - - - - - 227

PAGE

THE BUSH, MY LOVER
The camp-fire gleams resistance - - 229

A SPIN OF THE COIN
The Spring is warm and waking, and the wattle's bursting bud - - - 232

A DREAMER OF DREAMS
The song-thrush loves the laurel, - - 235

THE GRAVES OUT WEST
If the lonely graves are scattered in that fenceless vast God's Acre, - - - 237

FAIRY TALES
I chanced on an old brown book to-day 239

VILLANELLE
Last night in Memory's boughs aswing, - 241

BEN HALL'S STIRRUP-IRONS
A lithe young squatter passes in the dust, 243

BALLADE OF WINDY NIGHTS
Have you learnt the sorrow of windy nights - - - - - - 244

THE BUSHMAN'S FRIEND
Let the sailor tell of the roaring gale - 246

PAGE
THE CITY OF GRAY GRIEFS
Somewhere, hid in our hearts, a City stands - - - - - - 248
CHRISTMAS NIGHT
The lamps will be lit over seas to-night, - 250
THE CRUELLEST DREAM
So here at the last I find - - - 252
BOWMONT WATER
O, we think we're happy roving! - - 254
THE ROSE OUT OF REACH
A red rose grew on a southward wall, - 257
SORRY TO GO!"
I watched by the homestead where moonbeam and star - - - - - 259
THE LAND OF DUMB DESPAIR
Beyond where farthest drought-fires burn, - - - - - - 262
TO THE OVERLANDERS
Take this farewell from one must leave - 264

LIBRARY

FAIR GIRLS

Life has wreaths of each hue
But the Cypress binds all of them ;
Wreaths of Rose and of Rue,
Life has wreaths of each hue,
Laurel wreaths for a few,
Hemlock wreaths and the gall of them ;
Life has wreaths of each hue
But the Cypress binds all of them.

LIBRARY.

LEILA

THE nodding plumes steal slowly by ;
Fair women turn their heads aside ;
And yet the purest there must die
As poor Love-Leila died.

In town, a boy who never knew
Of better love than this
Is mourning Leila's eyes of blue,
And lone for Leila's kiss.

A horseman on the burning plains
A hundred miles north-west
Bends gently o'er his bridle-reins
And prays for Leila, *Rest !*

A man who buried all his dreams
Of Love long years ago,
Has dropped one other tear where gleams
Love-Leila's breast of snow.

All virtuous the world appears
  But those who turn aside
May never win such honest tears
  As fell when Leila died.

DRAY-DREAMS

O THE mountains speak of sadness!
There is gloom on ridge and spur;
But they cannot dim the gladness
In my heart because of her.
All day long I feel her near me;
To my soul her presence steals;
When I whisper she can hear me
Through the rolling of the wheels.

I can see my gold-haired Freda
(By the dull world undescried)
As I steer the old brown leader
Deftly down the mountain side;
As I chide the lazy shafter
Through the pine-spears on the grass,
I can hear her gentle laughter
In the green boughs as I pass.

And at times I hear her singing
  Softly when the west winds blow,
And the feathered pines are swinging
  On the range-top to and fro :
Dreamily I drive my cattle,
  Lulled to sleep above their reins
By the wheels' eternal rattle
  And the clinking of the chains

And her songs of love have stirred me,
  And I've answered from the shaft,
Till the wondering 'possums heard me
  And the kookaburras laughed !
Passion reigns the wide world over :
  Prince and pauper own his sway ;
And a lover is a lover
  Though he drive a two-horse dray !

Days are long and wheat's to carry
  Now ; but when the summer's by,
Fate allowing, we shall marry,
  Gold-haired Freda, you and I :
When in stress of winter weather
  Flowers are dead and skies are gray,
We'll go jogging home together,
  Loved and lover in a dray.

Life is dull and toil unending;
  But the voice of Love is sweet,
And the tide is always tending
  To the tryst where lovers meet:
Life is commonplace and real,
  Yet along its rock-strewn way
Each man sees his own ideal
  As he dreams upon his dray!

"POUR PASSER . . .

No sweep of hill or valley,
  No meadows daisy-pearled,
To break the line of mallee
  That bounds our little world.
The sun begins his bondage
  Behind the mallee tops,
And through their soft green frondage
  The sun at evening drops . . .

So day by day is given :
  And night by night we pray,
" Help, Lord of Hell or Heaven,
  To pass the time away !"

A canter through the clearing
  To where a white roof gleams ;
A vow, a passioned hearing,
  A mockery of Love's dreams :

Clasped hands and burning kisses,
  And whispers soft to say:
"There's no such way as this is
  To pass the time away!"

A gleam of snow-white shoulder,
  A clasp of rounded arms;
A month . . . and Love grown colder
  Has lost his luring charms.
A careless farewell spoken
  For ever and a day—
And one more brave heart broken
  To pass the time away!

GOLD TRESSES

You stand at my knee, Gold Tresses!
  Most true of all lovers of mine,
With lips that are fashioned for kisses
  And fingers that thrill where they twine;
And bitter at heart thus early,
  And weary of life am I,
And you are so happy, girlie—
  The sun and the birds say why!

Your heart is so pure, Gold Tresses!
  You know of no life like mine
That is hot to the brow with kisses
  And red to the lips with wine—
The hate in her courtly greetings,
  The scorn of her soft replies,
The shame of her stolen meetings,
  The grief of her wild good-byes.

Oh, fashion your wreaths in the sunlight
  Untouched of the mist and the rain,
For Youth is the rose light, the one light
  That never will gild us again;
And ours is the load you must borrow
  And ours is the path you must fare,
Who have passed by the archways of Sorrow
  And knocked at the gates of Despair.

You nestle with soft arms around me,
  Your face is upturned to my own,
The chains that have crippled and bound me
  Lie heavy and cold as a stone;
And out to the sunlight there surges
  A passionate longing and wild—
Ah, these are the whips and the scourges
  The lips and the hands of a child!

A BROKEN WEB

A SPIDER floated a silken thread
  In the grey of a misty morn
To fetter a rose to a rosebud red,
  A bloom to a bloom forlorn.

The dews brought diamond gifts to leave,
  The winds of dawn crooned by,
And the spider toiled with a heart to weave
  A web that would fill the sky.

The sun leaned out of the lifting mist
  And laughed to the silver threads,
And wherever his passionate lips had kissed
  Burned beautiful blues and reds.

But the maiden came with a sunny face
  And a butterfly-net in her hand,
And shattered the web in her reckless race—
  Too happy to understand.

And she danced away to the garden-door
With the wreck of her hands unseen,
But a rose will swing to a rose no more
With a silver chain between.

THE TOWNSHIP LIGHTS

WITH laughter and love-spells and witch-eyes of blue
A girl in the township is waiting for you.
There is nothing that thrills like a handclasp of hers,
So bridle your best horse and buckle your spurs;
We'll wait not for moonlight, but saddle and ride
With the lights of the township our goal and our guide.

There are glasses to empty and yarns to be spun;
There are cards to be handled and coin to be won;
There are light-footed dancers that wait in the hall
For the boys from the station to open the ball,
With its waltzes for wooing and lancers for love
While the lights of the township are dancing above

The day has been long in the dust and the heat,
But the way will be short with a guerdon so sweet;

The songs of the rover will shorten the miles
That the queen of our fancy makes bright with her
smiles;
And stirrup to stirrup we'll sing as we ride
To the lights of the township that glimmer and
guide.

We'll welcome old faces, our glasses we'll fill
Till the silver moon drops on the crest of the hill;
The words of our love to the night shall be borne,
Our song to the dawnwind, our laugh to the morn;
We'll dance till the sunbeams are out in the sky
And the lights of the township gleam faintly and die.

The world may despise us, and parsons disprove
That the night is for dancing and drinking and love,
But we'll saddle our horses and ride to the dance
And drink to the beauty that kills at a glance;
We'll hold to our loves and we'll stick to our creed
As long as the lights of the township may lead!

THE PARTING

THERE were trailing roses behind her
  And roses tall on the lawn,
And Love for a gift had twined her
  A crown of the crimson dawn;
She pondered on Life's swift changes,
  Looked westward and wondered why,
And fluttered a scarf to the ranges—
  And this was the girl's good-bye.

He rode with his burden of sorrow
  To the crest of the Big Divide,
And he thought of the long lone morrow
  And bent to the reins and sighed;
But turned with a great grief laden,
  And lookèd back once to the dell,
And waved a hand to the maiden—
  And this was the man's farewell.

Her heart was untouched as the snow's is,
  And cold as the white young year's;
She could not see for her roses,
  And he—for his blinding tears;
But no worlds wait for a woven spell,
  Though hope in the heart should die,
While brave men part with a fond farewell—
  And girls with a light good-bye!

"PERHAPS TO-NIGHT——!"

"Perhaps to-night——!" came flashing through the splendour
Of gleaming lights and gems and faces fair,
The touching hands, the whispers low and tender,
The love-lit glances and the scented air;
And then the beauty flickered down and faded,
A shadow grew and lingered on the light,
The shadow of a sword that hung keen-bladed
Above the revellers. "Perhaps to night——!"

"Perhaps to-night——!" If Death had passed the dancers
And clasped our hand in his before them all
We should have wept those vows and burning answers
And all the glamour of the lighted hall;
But far from love and lover in the meadow
We wait his summons and our eyes are bright,
For nothing but a friend can be the shadow,
And nothing but a hope—"Perhaps to-night——!"

TO A MISOGYNIST

You damn all women as wantons or worse
For a lover proved false in the days gone by:
There are women to worship as well as to curse—
And vows will break while the sun rides high!

Had you never a sister who held your hand
As you loitered together in Babyland,
Who guided your steps to the brightest bowers
Where the life-dawn flushed on the fairest flowers?
Had you never a mother who heard you lisp
Your baby prayers at her dear old knee,
Before Love's flame like a will-o'-the-wisp
Had lured you away to the storm-tossed sea?
Had you never a lover—before this last—
True to the dream ere the dream had passed;
Never a token, a tress or a curl,
To bind your life to one true-heart girl?

You damn all women as wantons or worse
For a lover proved false in the days gone by.
Say, was the blame of it—all of it—hers?
We are not so immaculate, you and I.

WHEN HORSES ARE SADDLED FOR LOVE

THE saddle-slaves of Love are we
  Who mount by sun and moon,
No matter what the season be
  So long as it be soon!
The golden and the gray light
  Have seen the girth-straps drawn
For Love that rules the daylight,
  The dark and dusk and dawn.

What hoof beat on the gravel!
  What haste with Love to be!
What snatching at the snaffle!
  What reefing, head to knee!
Now faster still and faster!
  The white Moon laughs above:
She knows we have no master
  Except the Lord of Love.

The low road keeps the river,
The high road skirts the hill—
No road so short but ever
We find a shorter still;
And if the floods run blindly
Where Love, not Life, 's the loss,
Dame Fortune treats us kindly
And holds our hands across.

The Bush-Wind blows to meet us
As though she understands;
The hop-bush holds to greet us
A hundred clasping hands;
There's not a bird but sings us
A welcome in the grove:
They know 't is Love that brings us—
And all the world loves Love!

Be skies alight or leaden
Long miles bring no regret,
And if the white spurs redden
Our horses soon forget:
So toss the bars, my beauty!
And cream the reins with foam;
It's ten moon-miles to duty,
And ten more dawn-miles home!

Gleam lights in the verandah ;
Flash lamps across the lawn ;
But soft the shadows yonder
Where reins are tightly drawn.
Out there the dews are glistening ;
The leaves are scarcely stirred,
So close the Night-Wind's listening
To every whispered word !

The Moon she dips to morning ;
The lamps are burning low,
Our love belated scorning . . .
"One kiss before I go !"
Now slowly through the starlight . .
Slow, slow, in dreams away . . .
Till eastward gleams the far light
That leads the breaking Day.

STAR AND STAR

You have crossed my life with your fair sweet face;
You are filling my lone heart's vacant place;
Your whispered words and your arms that cling
Are a link in Love's remembering;
For your forms are alike as the angels are,
Your faces are moulded as star and star.

I have taken your hand that is soft to take,
I have held it long for an old love's sake;
I have played with the curls of your golden head
As I played with gold curls in a day long dead;
And your rose-red lips I have tasted seem
Like the red-rose lips of a fading dream.

I held her once in my arms of old;
I kissed her twice, but her lips were cold:
I clasped you close to my heart to-night,
A heaving bosom of snowdrift white;

But there's never a snow could quench the fire
That burned in your passionate lips' desire!

With the pleading words 't is a wrong to name
You are holding your brow for the brand of shame;
There is never a pleasure I could not prove
In the name of the passion you think is Love;
There is never a freedom I might not take,
But . . . I spare you, girl, for an old love's sake!

I could blacken the fame you hold so cheap
While moonbeams sorrow and white stars weep;
But I drop your hand, though it give you pain—
I dream no dream on your lips again . . .
What reck if your heart, like mine, shall break?
I will spare your soul for Her white soul's sake!

TO-DAY !

HEAR me now ! for Time is flying,
And the beating of his wings
Drowns the vows of Love undying,
Dims the light where Memory clings !
All the saddest songs of Sorrow
Are the dirges of Delay,
And our hearts may lose to-morrow
What our hands may hold to-day.

When a grave beside the river
Claims the last of Love and you,
And Death's hand has dried for ever
All our wreaths of rose and rue ;
When the winding grass above you
Hides Hope's brightest lamp away,
How are you to know I love you
If I must not speak to-day ?

When above your silent sleeping
  Pitying pine-boughs moan and toss,
And the moonbeams pale with weeping
  Fling their snow-white arms across;
When the one star that was nearest
  Dims and dies a world away,
How am I to tell you, Dearest? . .
  Let me speak my love to-day!

HIS GIPPSLAND GIRL

Now, money was scarce and work was slack
And Love to his heart crept in,
And he rode away on the Northern track
To war with the World and win;
And he vowed by the locket upon his breast
And its treasure, one red-gold curl,
To work with a will in the farthest West
For the sake of his Gippsland girl.

The hot wind blows on the dusty plain
And the red sun burns above,
But he sees her face at his side again,
And he strikes each blow for Love:
He toils by the light of one far-off star
For the winning of one white pearl,
And the swinging pick and the driving bar
Strike home for the Gippsland girl.

With aching wrist and a back that's bent,
With salt sweat blinding his eyes,
'Tis little he'd reck if his life were spent
In winning so grand a prize;
And his shear-blades flash and over his hand
The folds of the white fleece curl,
And all day long he sticks to his stand
For the love of his Gippsland girl.

When the shearing's done and the sheds cut out
On Barwon and Narran and Bree;
When the shearer mates with the rouseabout
And the Union man with the free;
When the doors of the shanty, open wide,
An uproarious welcome hurl,
He passes by on the other side
For the sake of his Gippsland girl.

When Summer lay brown on the Western Land
He rode once more to the South,
Athirst for the touch of a lily hand
And the kiss of a rosebud mouth;
He sang the songs that shorten the way,
And he envied not king or earl,
And he spared not the spur in his dappled gray
For the sake of his Gippsland girl.

At the garden gate when the shadows fell
His hopes in the dusk lay dead;
"Nellie? Oh! Surely you heard that Nell
Is married a month!" they said.
He spoke no word; with a dull, dumb pain
At his heart, and his brain awhirl,
He turned his gray to the North again
For the sake of his Gippsland girl.

He rung the board in a Paroo shed
By the sweat of his aching brow,
And he blued his cheque, for he grimly said:
"There is nothing to live for now."
And out and away where the big floods start
And the Darling dust-showers whirl,
There's a drunken shearer that broke his heart
Over a Gippsland girl!

WHISPER LOW

WE have rowed together at even-fall
Down the creek in the sunset glow,
Under the vines and the box-trees tall
    That fringe the shores.
    Dip soft the oars!
Dip soft the oars and whisper low.

We have ridden away in the golden noon
Over the range where the sandals grow,
To wander home by a summer moon
    On silver plains.
    Draw tight the reins!
Draw tight the reins and whisper low.

We have sat in the garden at close of day
Watching the light from the blossoms go,
And the darkling branches melt away
    To Shadow Land.
    Love, hold my hand!
Love, hold my hand and whisper low.

And now we two, though the years have passed
Live in the Love of long ago,
Love that endured, and Love that will last
    As long as life.
    Kiss me, my wife!
Kiss me, my wife, and whisper low.

A TELL-TALE TRYST

O, WHO was it saddled White Star last night.
  And who was it saddled White Star ?
You can read his track to the rails and back
  And down the creek ever so far.
O, moonlight is lovers' light, Somebody knows,
  And witch-time the season to woo,
And down in the bend where the kurrajong grows
  The tracks have been trodden by two !

O, who was it galloped White Star last night,
  When gold stars jewelled the sky ?
You can see the brand of saddle and band
  In sweat that is clotted and dry.
O, Somebody raced, with the world asleep,
  To a tryst that Somebody knew,
And over the blue-grass fetlock-deep
  The white hoofs scattered the dew !

O, who was it fastened White Star last night
To a bough of the kurrajong-tree?
The deep-set grooves of his restless hooves
Are there for the World to see.
O, Somebody left him for True Love's sake.
And Somebody left him long,
For horses may hunger and bridles break
When True Love fashions her song!

O, who was it fondled White Star last night
When Somebody whispered adieu,
And plaited the gray of his mane in a way
That never those gray locks grew?
And who was it bent from his saddle-bow
To the plea of an upturned face,
While down in the bend where the kurrajongs grow
The World stood still for a space?

O, the lover who saddled White Star last night
It is very easy to guess,
For his face is bright with a new-found light
And a joy that his eyes confess.
O, Somebody met in the moonlight snow
Someone that cared to be kissed.
And the veriest dolt in the world may know
Who rode to the moonlight tryst!

GOOD-BYE, LYNETTE!

I HAVE worked for you—toil made sweet, love!
And never I grudged an hour;
Now the dead leaves drift at our feet, love,
That trod by the trees in flower!
The scent of the rose blows over—
Dead roses of all regret;
And you were my only lover,
So give me your hand, Lynette!

O, Love-Star loyally leading,
You fade in the gathering gray!
O, Hopes that have long lain bleeding,
I bury you deep to-day!
If Time has left never a token
The easier, love, to forget:
So over the old spells broken
Give me your hand, Lynette!

I have sounded the deeps of sorrow ;
I have drunk to the dregs of tears ;
I shall suffer no more to-morrow,
No more than in dead past years ;
And what is our life but greeting
And parting and long regret ?—
So here's to our first mad meeting !
And here's to our last, Lynette !

IN MULGA TOWN

We played at love in Mulga town,
And O, her eyes were blue!
We played at love in Mulga town,
And love's a game for two.
If three should play, alack-a-day!
There's one of them will rue,
Dear Heart!
There's one of them will rue.

Three played at love in Mulga town,
True love they could not hide;
Three played at love in Mulga town,
Two laughed: the other sighed;
Though two may woo the wide world through,
But one may kiss the bride,
Dear Heart!
But one may kiss the bride.

Three played at love in Mulga town,
And one's too sad to weep;
Three played at love in Mulga town—
The creek runs dark and deep;
So warm she flows no mortal knows
How cold her dead may sleep,
Dear Heart!
How cold her dead may sleep

THE OLD BOAT

The Old Boat lies in the sand and slime
And the sun is springing her planks ;
She is drifting away on the river of Time
Between Eternity's banks :
We have buried the low-toned laughter
And the whispers the Old Boat heard,
But the plash of the oars comes after
And the deeps of the years are stirred.

She has sailed with a burden of Love and Hope
From under these same old shores,
With white hands holding her tiller-rope
And brown arms bent to her oars . . .
In channels too deep for charting
Lies buried the freight of our ship,
And we go no more sweet-hearting
Where Life was a pleasure trip.

A new boat rocks at our feet to-day,
A picture is crimson and gold,
The daintiest craft on the creek, they say.
But she carries no freight like the Old ;
She swings in her painted splendour
The flood and the fall between,
But there's never a blade can send her
The way that the Old Boat's been.

You are sport of the sunlight and weather :
See, I drag you, Old Boat, to the shade !
We were comrades so often together
For love of the one little maid . . .
Should she come to the wilgas, I wonder
Would ever it cost her a tear
To see the new boat rocking under
And you in the dead leaves up here !

LOVE'S MOLOCH

How long shall we hear the sobbing?
  How long shall our hearts beat slow
To the wail of a ceaseless sorrow
  That follows us to and fro,
Who watch from our safe rock-ramparts
  The wreck of the ringless brides
On the flow of the crimson sunsets,
  On the ebb of the white moon-tides?

They walk in the weeping darkness,
  They hold on a wasted arm
What Love cannot guard from hunger
  Or Passion itself keep warm;
They walk in the weeping darkness,
  They clasp to their breasts of shame
The pitiful white-faced burdens
  The World will refuse to name.

They bend to the wee wan faces,
  And scald with their burning tears
The tiny lips that will curse them
  When knowledge has come with years ;
They weep to their rocking cradles
  Whose labour should prove so sweet,
And the wealth of their white girl-garlands
  Lies crushed at the gray World's feet.

They creep to our curtained windows ;
  They stand at our doors thrice-barred ;
And their feet are torn and bleeding
  Who found that their path was hard.
Their hands that we held may touch us ;
  Their lips that we loved may plead ;
But never an ear will hearken,
  And never a heart will heed.

They shrink from the glaring sunlight,
  But down where the lamps are lit
They stretch a hand to their Sorrow
  And drink to the deeps of it ;
There are sins that the Night will pardon,
  And smiles for the roses red . . .
O, Woe to the maiden-mothers !
  And Woe to the bonds unsaid !

How long shall we lead the victims ?
  How long in a crimson flood
Shall the gates of our great Gomorrah
  Be washed in our sisters' blood ?
How long shall they heap the altars ?
  How long shall their cry be heard
Ere the fire and the brimstone teach us
  That the anger of God is stirred !

WHERE THE BRUMBIES COME TO WATER

THERE'S a lonely grave half-hidden where the bluegrass droops above,
And the slab is rough that marks it, but we planted it for love;
There's a well-worn saddle hanging in the harness-room at home
And a good old stock-horse waiting for the steps that never come;
There's a mourning rank of riders closing in on either hand
O'er the vacant place he left us—he, the best of all the band,
Who is lying cold and silent with his hoarded hopes unwon
Where the brumbies come to water at the setting of the sun.

Some other mate with rougher touch will twist our greenhide thongs,
And round the fire some harsher voice will sing his lilting songs;
His dog will lick some other hand, and when the wild mob swings
We'll get some slower rider to replace him in the wings;
His horse will find a master new ere twice the sun goes down,
But who will kiss his light-o'-love a-weeping in the town?—
His light o'-love who kneels at night beyond the long lagoon
Where the brumbies come to water at the rising of the moon.

We've called her hard and bitter names who chose—another's wife—
To chain our comrade in her thrall and wreck his strong young life;
We've cursed her for her cruel love that seared like hate—and yet
We know when all is over there is one will not forget,

As she piles the white bush blossoms where her poor
lost lover lies
With the death-dew on his forehead and the grave-
dark in his eyes,
Where the shadow-line is broken by the moonbeams'
silver bars,
And the brumbies come to water at the lighting of
the stars.

GOOD-BYE

HERE, on the broken strings of Love's mute harp,
Across the withered flowers of all dead dreams,
Give me your hand and take my last farewell!
One glance of love!—the last from those dear eyes!—
For out against the reddening sky, cut sharp
Rigging and spar, her head to the ocean swell,
Cruel as Death the great ship waiting lies.

One dear Good-bye!
                    Hush! say not, "As a friend"—
The old, old phrase 't were bitterness to hear
Only that every word you say is sweet;
For I have fifty friends, but not one love,
And only ask for *you* here at the end
As in those days when first we loved to meet
With all God's world our own, His arm above.

One prayer for me!
Nay! not "That you forget!"—
For why should I forget the sweets of Life
Who launch into its bitterness to-day?
But pray you rather that I keep your face
Before me always, with its blue eyes wet
With tears denying those cold words you say;
Your clinging hands almost a mute embrace

The light of Day is growing as we stand;
The light of Love is dying in your eyes;
Before yon sun has drifted to his rest
In crimson splendour down the western sky
For me will fall the dark.
Dear nestling hand,
And soft white arms, and lips still unconfessed,
The white sails fill!
Heart of my Heart, *Good-bye*!

GRAY HORSES

This worship of Horse
Is a sin and a curse,
So we hear in our parson's talk ;
But we're steering straight
For the Golden Gate,
And we may as well ride as walk.
Shall our friendship break
O'er the way we take
Since neither will follow it back ?
Let him hump his load
Down the two-chain road—
I'm going the Bridle-Track !

FROM THE GULF

STORE cattle from Nelanjie! The mob goes feeding past,
With half-a-mile of sandhill 'twixt the leaders and the last;
The nags that move behind them are the good old Queensland stamp—
Short backs and perfect shoulders that are priceless on a camp;
And these are *Men* that ride them, broad-chested, tanned, and tall,
The bravest hearts amongst us and the lightest hands of all:
Oh, let them wade in Wonga grass and taste the Wonga dew,
And let them spread, those thousand head—for we've been droving too!

Store cattle from Nelanjie! By half-a-hundred
towns,
By Northern ranges rough and red, by rolling open
downs,
By stock-routes brown and burnt and bare, by flood-
wrapped river-bends,
They've hunted them from gate to gate—the drover
has no friends!
But idly they may ride to-day beneath the scorching
sun
And let the hungry bullocks try the grass on Wonga
run;
No overseer will dog them here to "see the cattle
through,"
But they may spread their thousand head—for we've
been droving too!

Store cattle from Nelanjie! They've a naked track
to steer;
The stockyards at Wodonga are a long way down
from here;
The creeks won't run till God knows when, and half
the holes are dry;
The tanks are few and far between and water's dear
to buy:

LIBRARY

There's plenty at the Brolga bore for all his stock and mine—
We'll pass him with a brave God-speed across the Border Line;
And if he goes a five-mile stage and loiters slowly through,
We'll only think the more of him—for we've been droving too!

Store cattle from Nelanjie! They're mute as milkers now;
But yonder grizzled drover, with the care-lines on his brow,
Could tell of merry musters on the big Nelanjie plains,
With blood upon the chestnut's flanks and foam upon the reins;
Could tell of nights upon the road when those same mild-eyed steers
Went ringing round the river bend and through the scrub like spears;
And if his words are rude and rough, we know his words are true,
We know what wild Nelanjies are—and we've been droving too!

Store cattle from Nelanjie! Around the fire at
night
They've watched the pine-tree shadows lift before the
dancing light;
They've lain awake to listen when the weird bush-voices speak,
And heard the lilting bells go by along the empty
creek;
They've spun the yarns of hut and camp, the tales of
play and work,
The wondrous tales that gild the road from Normanton to Bourke;
They've told of fortunes foul and fair, of women false
and true,
And well we know the songs they've sung—for we've
been droving too!

Store cattle from Nelanjie! Their breath is on the
breeze;
You hear them tread, a thousand head, in blue-grass
to the knees;
The lead is on the netting-fence, the wings are
spreading wide,
The lame and laggard scarcely move—so slow the
drovers ride!

But let them stay and feed to-day for sake of Auld
Lang Syne;
They'll never get a chance like this below the Border
Line;
And if they tread our frontage down, what's that to
me or you?
*What's ours to fare, by God they'll share! for we've been
droving too!*

THE RIDING OF THE REBEL

He was the Red Creek overseer, a trusted man and true,
Whose shoulder never left the wheel when there was work to do;
Through all the day he rode the run, and when the lights grew dim
The sweetest wife that ever loved would wait and watch for him.
She brought him dower of golden hair and eyes of laughing blue,
Stout heart and cunning bridle-hand to guide the mulga through;
And when the mob was mustered from the box flats far and wide
She loved to mount the wildest colts that no one else would ride.

And once it chanced a wayward steed, half-mouthed
and roughly broke,
Denied the touch of gentle hand and gentler words
she spoke,
And, plunging forward like the ship that feels the
autumn gales,
He reared and lost his footing and fell backwards on
the rails.
Her husband bent above her with cold terror at his
heart—
The form was still he loved so well, the wan lips
would not part;
And all the day in trance she lay, but when the stars
smiled down
He heard his name low-whispered and he claimed her
still his own.
And afterward he spoke his fear: "Heart's Love, *if
you should die!* . . .
Unless you take your orders from some other man
than I,
You shall never finger bridle, never mount on horse's
back,
Till the outlaw on Glenidol is a broken lady's
hack!"

There's an outlaw on Glenidol that is known through all the West,
And three men's lives are on his head, bold riders of the best;
The station lads have heard the sneer that travelled far and wide
And flung the answering challenge: "Come and teach us how to ride!
Roll up, ye merry riders all, whose honour is to guard!
We've mustered up the ranges and The Rebel's in the yard;
His open mouth and stamping foot and keen eye flashing fire
Repeat the temper of his dam, the mettle of his sire.
Roll up, ye merry riders all, from hut and camp and town!
You'll have to stick like plaster when the stockyard rails go down.
But the boss will come down handsome, as the boss is wont to come,
To the first who brings The Rebel under spurs and greenhide home."

And the stockmen heard the challenge from the
Cooper to the Bree,
And rode from hut and cattle-camp by one and two
and three
To keep their horseman's honour clean and play a
hero's part,
To best the bold Glenidol boys and break The Rebel's
heart.

And Ruddy Neil, the breaker, from the Riverine
came through
With all the latest breaking-gear, and all the wiles he
knew,
But ere the saddle was secured, before a girth was
drawn,
The Rebel's forefoot split his skull—they buried him
at dawn!
Marora Mick, the half-caste, from the Flinders River
came
To give the South-the-Border boys a lesson at the
game;
But he got a roguish welcome when he entered New
South Wales,
For The Rebel used his blood and brains to paint the
stockyard rails!

And Mulga Jack came over from the Yuinburra
side—
The horse was never foaled, they say, that Mulga
could not ride:
With a mouth as hard as a miser's heart, a will like
the Devil's own,
The Rebel made for the Stony Range with the man
who wouldn't be thrown;
The Rebel made for the Stony Range, where the
plain and the scrub-land meet,
And the dead boughs cracked at his shoulder-blade,
the stones leapt under his feet,
And the ragged stems of the gidyas cut and tore as
they blundered past . . .
And Jack lay cold in the sunset gold—he had met
with his match at last.

And once again the challenge rang, the bitterer for
scorn,
And spoke the bold Glenidol boys, their jackets
mulga-torn:
"A week have we been hunting him and riding fast
and hard
To give you all another chance—The Rebel's in the
yard."

And the stockmen heard the challenge from the
Cooper to the Bree;
But "I'm getting old!" "I'm getting stiff!" or "I've
a wife, you see!"
Came whispered to the border: and the horse they
could not tame
Had saved Glenidol from disgrace and cleansed a
sullied name.
But ere the reddening sun went down and night on
the ranges broke
A stranger youth to the slip-rails rode, and fastened
his horse and spoke
Softly and low, yet not so low but that every man
there heard:
"I've come to tackle your outlaw colt,"—and he
looked as good as his word.
He bridled The Rebel in failing light, and saddled the
colt and drew
The straps of his gearing doubly tight and looked that
his "length" was true.
He mounted The Rebel and gave the word, and the
clattering rails went down,
And the outlaw leapt at the open gate and into the
shadows brown;

But he settled himself to the soothing voice and the
touch of the fondling hand,
As it followed the curve of his arching neck from
wither to forehead-band;
His flanks were wet with the fresh-sprung sweat, his
shoulders lathered with foam,
And he bent to the bridle and played with the bit as
he came at a canter home.
And the boys were dumb with wonder, and sat, and
the Red Creek overseer
Was first to drop from the stockyard fence and give
him a hearty cheer.
He raised his hat in answer and . . the gold hair
floated free!
And the blue eyes lit with laughter as she shouted
merrily:
"You can reach me down my bridle, give my girths
and saddle back,
For the outlaw of Glenidol is a broken lady's hack!"

FOUR-IN-HAND

O SOME prefer a single,
Or double not too free;
But let the lead-bars jingle—
It's Four-in-Hand for me;
With a level road and a lively load
Whose chorus songs shall beat
To the hoof-struck stars and the rattling bars,
And the ring of the red roans' feet!

We'll meet some risks as we move along—
And maybe more than we dream;
But we only ask for harness strong,
And room to handle the team.
I'll give the rein, and give again,
And whirl the whip-lash free,
Till every place shall know by pace
My four red roans and me!

Our Life's too short for dreaming,
  And Life's too swift for tears,
With all the wide world gleaming
  Beyond our leaders' ears ;
The white dust whirls to blind us,
  The coach top rocks and reels,
But trouble's flung behind us
  Beneath our roaring wheels !

By day the sun shall light us,
  The peaks of pleasure guide ;
No storms have power to smite us,
  So fast we race and ride !
By night, through moon-wash spinning,
  We'll mock the million stars,
With all Luck's goblins grinning
  Astride our swingle-bars !

So lift the loin-cloths from the reds
  And hand me up the whip ;
Let go the plunging leader's heads
  And let the beauties rip !
Here's luck to shoulders foam-impearled,
  And eyes where wild-fires gleam !
We'll swing the red roans round the world
  Till Death reins up the team !

THE STOCKYARD LIAR

If ever you're handling a rough one
  There's bound to be perched on the rails
Of the Stockyard some grizzled old tough one
  Whose flow of advice never fails ;
There are plenty, of course, who aspire
  To make plain that you're only a dunce,
But the most insupportable liar
  Is the man who has "ridden 'em once."

He will tell you a tale and a rum one,
  With never a smile on his face,
How he broke for old Somebody Some-one
  At some unapproachable place ;
How they bucked and they snorted and squealed
  How he spurred 'em and flogged 'em, and how
He would gallop 'em round till they reeled—
  But he's "getting too old for it now."

How you're standing too far from her shoulder
Or too jolly close to the same,
How *he* could have taught you to hold her
In the days when he "followed the game;"
He will bustle, annoy and un-nerve us
Till even *our* confidence fails—
O Shade of old Nimrod! preserve us
From the beggar that sits on the rails!

How your reins you are holding too tightly,
Your girth might as well be unloosed;
How "young chaps" don't handle them rightly,
And horses don't buck "like they used;"
Till at last, in a bit of a passion,
You ask him in choicest "Barcoo"
To go and be hanged, in a fashion
That turns the whole atmosphere blue!

And the chances are strong the old buffer
Has been talking for something to say,
And never rode anything rougher
Than the shaft of old Somebody's dray;
And the horses he thinks he has broken
Are clothes-horses sawn out of pine,
And his yarns to us simply betoken
The start of a senile decline.

There are laws for our proper protection
  From murder and theft and the rest,
But the criminal wanting inspection
  Is riding a rail in the West;
And the law that the country requires
  At the hands of her statesmen of sense
Is a law to make meat of the liars
  That can sit a rough buck – on the fence!

THE BORDER GATE

Dawn gilds the spiders' bridges ;
  Morn mocks the shadows' rout ;
A mile back on the ridges
  They put the head-lights out ;
A red-topped coach from Nor'ward
  Comes down with clacking bars :
The waking Day lies forward,
  Behind—the drowsy stars !
A foe no floods can ruin,
  A force no droughts abate,
The night mail from the Tuen
  Swings through the Border Gate !

A still world, faint and swooning
  Beneath a fevered sky ;
Before the great wheels' groaning
  Slow bullocks snailing by ;

With dusty, cursing drivers,
And roaring fall of whips
Comes rocking from red rivers
The cream of Queensland clips.
"*Get off, there! Clown and Drover!*"
The brown loads creak and grate.
"*Stand over, there!* STAND OVER!"
She clears the Border Gate!

A sunset-fired horizon
Beyond the dust-wrack dense,
A draft from Jimmy Tyson
Slow-feeding to the fence;
A rush of long-horned leaders,
A tramp of feet below,
A ripping of red "bleeders"
And "*Woh, there! Woh, boys!* WOH-H!"
The posts are strong—with reason,
That stand to such a weight;
The finest stores this season
Crowd through the Border Gate!

The old gay life is over;
We've left the great North Road;
The red dust wraps the drover,
The gray dust hides the load;

Though no more I'll go through you,
  Old Gate of Memories mine !
I wave a brown hand to you
  From long leagues down the line . . .
Wherever Time shall speed me
  Before the winds of Fate
I know my dreams will lead me
  Back to the Border Gate !

OUTLAWS BOTH

STEADY! steady, my pearl! from the crest of the range
One last look behind us: the roofs of the town
Are lit with red fires that quiver and change
Where the sun in the westward goes royally down!
Yonder light will return to the township again,
But we are cast out from the dwellings of men.

You—the pride of the paddock, the pick of the yard,
The bold one that scorned to be bridled and bound,
Whose mettle and swiftness shall now be my guard,
Whose courage and confidence girdle me round!
I—who struck for my honour, as others can tell,
The blow that was given too straightly and well!

Outlaws both, you and I! Through the night and the day,
From red flush of dawning till rise of the moon,
The sound of your hoof-beat shall echo away
By rock-ragged ranges and reedy lagoon;
And their steeds will be swift and their trackers be keen
If we stand to their challenge, "In name of the Queen!"

With our bed in the bluegrass, our tower on the ridge,
Our kingdom the scrub-land from centre to sea,
The wild-fowl that sweep from the billabong edge
Are never so curbless of pinion as we—
With only the coast-line for bolts and for bars,
With our roof-beam the sky and our lamp-light the stars!

Ay! they feared you of old time, the cravens that passed
From the rails of the yard when the danger began!
And now, should they follow, they'll find at the last
There is more to be feared from a desperate man;
And they'll know by red spurs and by foam-covered reins
They are riding the tracks of the Pride of the Plains!

From the roofs of the township the sun-fire has fled,
And the Night Queen will reign in her majesty soon;
Shall life be less dear for the sunlight that's dead?
When the shadows are falling we'll ride by the moon;
And the limitless bush where the wild cattle roam
Shall lend to the outlaws a refuge and home.

THE COACH OF DEATH

THERE'S a phantom-coach runs nightly along the
Western creeks;
Her four black steeds step lightly, her driver never
speaks;
The horses keep their places across the flood-worn
plains
Yet no man sees their traces, their bits or bridle-reins;
For welcome or for warning she shows no lamp or
light,
A shadow till the morning she steals across the night.

She never wants for passengers, the back-creek settlers
say,
A price so moderate as hers the poorest purse can
pay;

The lost one, missed by measure of days or maybe
weeks,
Pays lightly for the pleasure of coaching down the
creeks;
And station-hands and squatters, alike in ease
reclined,
May praise the whirling trotters whose hoofs outstrip
the wind.

You hear no lead-bars creaking, no footfall on the
ground;
In silence past all speaking the flying wheels go
round;
The horses have no breeders, their driver has no name,
But he swings his reefing leaders like a man that
knows the game;
And through the stony ranges where swift hoofs strike
no fire
They want no wayside changes, these steeds that never
tire.

They're fit to "stay" for ever, and are never short of
work;
They run the Darling River from Menindie Lake to
Bourke,

Where a thousand watercourses, bank-full or bound
with drought,
Have seen the silent horses go gliding in and out,
Where the stars in red battalions are marshalled in
the sky
To watch the black-maned stallions with the muffled
hoofs go by.

They fear him on the Barwon and curse him on the
Bree,
And wish his goal a far one, where'er that goal may
be;
But ever back and forward, in silence, source to
mouth,
He runs the rivers Nor'ward and runs the rivers
South;
When winds the wavelets feather between the flood
and fall
He holds the blacks together and hears the dead
men call.

In drifted flood-wrack sailing on every swirling
stream
He hears his patrons hailing, and checks his noiseless
team;

In belts of timber shady, when all the holes are dry,
His guests are waiting ready when the phantom wheels go by,
For every man in good time must book for Further Out:
It may be in the Flood-time—it may be in the Drought!

Her load of clay-cold faces she never carries back;
The dim wheels leave no traces, the shoeless hoofs no track;
But all along the river in the bends that she has passed
The giant gum-trees shiver in a strange and icy blast;
The clumps of scented sandal are tainted with her breath,
And teams are hard to handle behind the Coach of Death.

She lifts no mud in winter, and stirs no summer dust,
Her pole-bars never splinter, her lock-bolts never rust;

Her parts are stout for wearing and strong her simple gear,
She'll run without repairing from year to deathful year,
When every coach is rotten on the Western water-shed,
And Cobb and Co. forgotten and all their drivers dead!

DARRELL

So I've taken his hundred notes in the end,
  And now, as I turn them over,
I feel like a man who's been false to a friend,
  Or has broken his troth to a lover.
And what will they purchase, when all is said,
  For me with the world's wealth laden?
A barrel or two of Kaludah red,
  Or the favour of some light maiden!

Our wine turns gall at the gray day's birth
  When the lamp of the revel paleth;
We know what the kiss of a woman is worth—
  But a good horse never faileth.
Your white arms clinging, my ringless bride,
  Are bonds that the years will sever;
But the brave hoof-thunder of Darrell's stride
  Will beat in my heart for ever!

You know how little of truth there lies
In the heart of your hot caresses;
There is danger hid in your dreamful eyes,
There is death in your winding tresses;
And, since you would turn for a fairer face
Or a stronger arm's enfolding,
You will never hold in my heart the place
That one honest horse is holding.

The stars are fading by one and one
And the fires of the dawn are lightening
The web that a pitiless Fate has spun,
And my own cursed hand is tightening;
Oh! better this arm had lost its force,
This brain in the dust lain idle,
Before I bartered the grandest horse
That ever carried a bridle!

OFF THE GRASS

THEY were boasting on the Greenhide of their nags of fancy breed,
And stuffing them with bran and oats to run in Gumleaf Town,
But we hadn't got a racehorse that was worth a dish of feed,
So didn't have a Buckley's show to take the boasters down.

For old Midnight was in Sydney and we couldn't get him up
In time for Gumleaf Races if it *had* been worth our while;
The Chorus colt was far too light to win the Gumleaf Cup,
And we didn't own a hackney that could finish out the mile.

But we couldn't watch them win it while we never
had a say,
So we mustered up the horses, and we caught old
Myall King;
He's as brave as ever galloped, but he's twelve if he's
a day,
And we couldn't help but chuckle at the humour
of the thing.

But, though shaky in the shoulders, he's the daddy of
them all;
He's the gamest bit of horseflesh from the Snowy
to the Bree;
Of the kind that's never beaten, coming every time
you call:
One of those you sometimes read about but very
seldom see.

He's the don at every muster and the king of every
camp;
He's the lad to stop the pikers when they take you
on the rush;
And he loves the merry rattle of the stockwhip and
the tramp
Of the cockhorned mulga scrubbers when they're
breaking in the brush.

He can foot the Greenhide brumbies if they take a
mile of start,
And if they get him winded in a gallop on the
plain
He's as game as any lion, and he carries such a
heart
You can never say he's beaten, for he'll always come
again!

So we put up Jack the Stockman with his ten pounds
overweight,
And he lengthened out the leathers half-a-foot and
gave a smile:
"I don't suppose you'll see us when they're fairly in
the straight,
But we'll make the beggars travel, take my oath,
for half-a-mile!'

And they started, and the old horse jumped away
a length in front,
And every post they came to gave the brown a
longer lead,
Till it seemed that there was nothing else but Myall
in the hunt,
With his load of station honour and his weight of
mulga feed!

Then the bay mare, Bogan Lily, started out to cut him down;
She had travelled out five hundred miles to win the Gumleaf Cup,
And she couldn't well get beaten by a hack in Gumleaf Town
When she had to pay expenses for her owner's journey up.

So she started out to catch the old brown camp-horse from the Bush,
And a furlong from the finish she could nose his rider's knee,
Then you should have heard the shouting of the Bogan Lily push,
And the flinging of their hats up was a sight for you to see!

But old Myall King had often been as nearly beat before,
And he steadied off a little, while the mare shot out ahead,
Then he shook his ears and gripped the bit—you should have heard us roar
As he came at Bogan Lily with his flanks a streak of red!

And the little bay mare, beaten, gave him best and threw it up,
And we heard her rider murmur as he saw the brown horse pass
And Jack the Stockman drop his hands and win the Gumleaf Cup—
"Beat by a hungry cripple of a camp-horse, off the grass!"

Then we led him in a winner, and they cheered him from the stand,
With the black sweat running channels from his fore-arm to his foot,
And the white foam on his shoulder till you couldn't see the brand,
And the crimson bloodstains scattered over spur and flank and boot.

So we carried off the honours of the meeting—*and the notes*;
And the men on Greenhide River, when they see our fellows pass,
Will tell you this in whispers, "You can train your nags on oats,
But be careful when you're racing those dashed scrubbers off the grass!"

HIS EPITAPH

On a little old bush racecourse at the back of No Man's Land,
Where the mulgas mark the furlong, and a dead log marks the stand,
There's a square of painted railing showing white against the loam
Where they fight for inside running as they round the bend for home ;
Just a lonely grave and graveyard that are left to Nature's care,
For the wild bush-flowers that brighten it were never planted there ;
No monument or marble that will speak his praise or blame,
No verse to tell his story and no mark to prove his name,

But carved upon the white rail that is weather-worn
and thin
Is the simple, rough-hewn legend: HE ALWAS ROD
TO WIN!

Some poor, uncared-for jockey-boy, who never earned
a name—
It's the boys who "ride to orders" who can find the
road to Fame;
And the flowers and marble head-stones and the
wealth of gear and gold
Are the prizes of the riders who will "stop them"
when they're told
Just a whisper at the saddling: "He's the only
danger, Dan,
That's the boy will try to beat you—stop him, *any
way you can!*"
Just a crowding at the corner and a crossing in the
straight
And a plucky little horseman who is "pulling out"
too late;
A heavy fall, a loose horse – and a lightweight carried
in—
A shallow grave, a railing, and · HE ALWAS ROD TO
WIN!

Some brave, brown-handed comrade who has learned the rider's worth
Has carved those rough words o'er him for the eyes of all the earth;
And though few may chance to pass him as he lies in simple state
Those few will hold him honoured by the friendship of his mate.
And when, in Life's keen struggle, we shall fight for inside place,
When they crowd us at the corner and we drop from out the race,
When the ringing hoofs go forward and the cheering greets the best,
And the prize is for the winner and the red spurs for the rest,
May we find some true-heart comrade, when they've filled the last clods in,
Who will carve these words above us: He Alwas Rod to Win!

THE DINGO OF BRIGALOW GAP

For K.G. or coronet, kingdom or crown,
The boys on Kalangada care not a rap;
But the honour they ask for is galloping down
The red and white dingo of Brigalow Gap.
He has beaten us fairly at every exchange;
He is hard to keep up with and harder to track,
He knows every stone on the Brigalow Range—
The fastest and wildest and worst of the pack.
Good horses behind him with rowels we've raked:
On Bogan the bushcrows are feasting their fill,
And Footstep is foundered and Starlight is staked,
But the red and white dingo makes light of us still.
For him a fast gallop is nothing but fun —
Too cunning to poison, too wary to trap,
You can't get the sight of a rifle or gun
On the red and white dingo of Brigalow Gap.

He has tasted the Lincolns and fancies the breed,
He has tried the Kalangada culls for a change.
And we know that he'll never go short of a feed
As long as our wethers run under the range.
He's the scourge of the country, the plague of the spot,
The curse of the owner, the bane of the boss ;
For he's got to be reckoned with, like it or not,
When the latter is squaring his profit and loss.
On the walls of the stable are trophies galore,
The goal and the guerdon of many a ride ;
And a place is reserved at the top of the door
For the honour of holding his red and white hide ;
But the days and the weeks they go merrily by,
The skins on the stable-wall flutter and flap,
They have plenty of time to get shrivelled and dry
While they wait for the dingo at Brigalow Gap.

There are yellows and brindles and crossbreds of black,
The pride of the station, the talk of the town,
But we'd gladly give all to be out on his track,
With his stride getting short and the crows coming down.

His life may be safe, but, believe me! for that
He hasn't Kalangada kindness to thank:
We tracked him two days ago over the flat,
We heard him last night at the Marathon tank;
And we saw him to-day as he skirted the brush
A mile from the corner of Halliday's fence.
We took to him then with a cavalry rush,
And charged the thick scrub with more spirit than sense;
For, whenever that devil's limb leads us a dance,
We gallop to glory, whatever may hap;
But down in the gully we got our last glance
At the red and white dingo of Brigalow Gap.

He has conquered us fairly, we're bound to confess
(We claim to be sportsmen, and know when we're beat);
His triumph the greater, our credit the less
That we ride fairly well, and our horses are fleet.
Perhaps, when the days of the dingo are done,
And the race, barring him, is extinct in the land,
When cocky-selectors have swallowed the run,
And various fortunes have scattered our band:

Perhaps, when with sorrow that scarce can be borne
He watches the last of his foemen depart;
When the sheep-walks are furrowed and planted with corn,
And the want of a gallop is breaking his heart;
When his life is a burden bereft of its joys,
That old age embitters and sicknesses sap,
He'll suffer the greybeards that once were "the boys"
To catch him on foot in the Brigalow Gap!

HOW THE CHESTNUT HORSE CAME HOME

Twenty miles across the ranges there's a patch of cane-grass clears
Half-a-mile of tangled mulga; hides a score of native spears,
While the horseman sings a love-song, with no shadow of his fate
Till the stock-horse swerves and plunges from the cane-grass swamp – too late!
Heavy from his glossy shoulder falls a dead weight to the ground,
And the dark blood splashes upward as the big horse makes the bound;
With his wild eyes great with terror and his scarlet nostrils spread
Leaps he madly to the mulga from the dark form of the dead;

Laden with the purple bloodstains, for the words he
cannot speak,
Thunders down the crimson sunset to the homestead
by the creek;
Loudly over range and roadway ring the hoofs their
notes of doom,
Straight as arrow to the gateway . . . So the
chestnut horse came home!

What's the dustcloud down the plain, Jack? Yours
are younger eyes than mine;
Comes too fast for team or buggy, and the coach
ain't due till nine.
Harry Olden? How he's riding? Well, we needn't
wonder, Jack;
For a man that's newly-married doesn't linger on the
track.
There's his little woman waiting over by the cottage
door:
By the Powers of Earth and Heaven! What the
smoke's he racing for?
I would rather lose a tenner—he must stop this
blessed game—
I would rather lose a hundred than he ride old
Khyber lame.

Not a horse upon the river . . . What is that
you're saying, Jack?
Khyber making for the gateway with no rider on his
back!
Bridle broken, breastplate flying, chest and shoulder
white with foam!
Stand away there! Take the rails down! . . . So
the chestnut horse came home!

She is standing in the garden, and the gleam of sunset falls
Through the pepper trees and blue gums on the whitewashed cottage walls;
She is watching through the sunset till her eyes their
guerdon meet;
In the still air she is listening for the stroke of
Khyber's feet;
Now she whispers, "I can see him; he is riding fast
to-night!"
Eagerly her heart is beating, and her eyes have Love's
own light.
"Khyber's fond of racing homewards! Dear old
Harry lets him go,
For he knows that I am waiting; anxious when the
sun gets low,

What's the big crowd at the slip-rails? Harry's
coming home in state!
If I run across the garden I shall meet him at the
gate!" . . .

*In the silent awe-struck circle, speechless lips and brows
of gloom,*
*Not one man the man to tell her how the chestnut horse
came home!*

A DRAFT FROM TRINGADEE

Lead me down to the stockyard, Jim, to the butt of the old box-tree!
I would like to be there when they're yarding the bullocks from Tringadee.
They were always beggars to rush and ring and rattle the gidya spars,
And gave us our work to get them safe at the back of the twelve-foot bars.

I can hear them crashing the blue-grass through, away in the river bend,
And I hear their thousand voices in one splendid challenge blend.
Listen! the music of stockwhips! Nearer and nearer they come!
How I wish I were out in the daylight fetching the scrubbers home!

Yesterday there has been riding, Jim! on sandhill
and ridge and plain,
From pines into twisted mulga, from mulga to pines
again;
Galloping over the deadwood, Jim, and dodging the
swinging boughs;
Wheeling the Tringa bullocks and tailing the Tringa
cows.

Yesterday, out on the camp, Jim, there has been
work, I'll swear!
Charge to be met with a stockwhip, or maybe a flank
laid bare;
And all last night, in the moonlight, what drowsing
and dropping of reins
As they dozed with the tiring cattle over the salt-
bush plains!

Now they are close to the yard, Jim! the leaders are
steadying:
Hark! there's a horseman galloping past to wheel
them into the wing!
That's Mick, by the roar of his stockwhip; and Wilga
Boy by his stride;
I can almost *see* the foam on his neck and the blood
on his rowelled side.

Come a little bit closer, Jim! you may laugh at a
blind man's fear;
But it's one thing riding old Tempest, another thing
crouching here.
I never knew fear on the chestnut, and loved the
thick of the fight;
But somehow it chills the heart of a man, this living
in endless night.

That's an outlaw broke from the mob, Jim! I know
by his angry roar;
And somebody's dropping the whip so quick he hasn't
got time to gore.
They've wheeled him back to the others: my God! if
I could but see!
It is hard to be standing idle when they're yarding
from Tringadee.

Their breath is laden with trefoil, and under their
trampling feet
At every turn of the battle the smell of the dust is
sweet;
Odours more dear than these to me the winds can
never bring,
Or waft me grander music than the march when cattle
ring.

The last of the mob is yarded, rails up, and the
stockwhip's dumb;
It's cold and the fun is over—we may as well shuffle
home.
Give me your arm again, Jim! a kind mate you must
be,
To miss, for a blind old cripple, a muster at Tringadee!

TAKEN OVER

The Banks are taking charge, old man! I knew how it would be;
The flags are flying half-mast high for death of Tringadee;
The Boss has left; the boys are spread to all the winds—and so
I think we'd better get the nags and sling the packs and go!

It's been a dear old home to us, a home we'll not forget;
And we've been loyal to the brand and would be loyal yet;
But there is strife among the crew whose captain leaves the ship—
The team won't pull together when a new hand takes the whip

We've had for Boss the best of men—they know him
far and wide;
From Sydney out to Normanton they speak his name
with pride;
And though we search from now till doom in every
clime and land,
We'll never find a truer heart or defter bridle-
hand.

They've got some new-chum manager, and sent him
up from town
To spoil the mouth of Myall King and break old
Vanguard down;
The horses that the Boss was proud to steer in scrub
and plain
Will never toss the bridle-bars beneath his hand
again.
They've picked their would-be stockmen from the
raw, rough Sydney push,
That never saw a bucking colt or smelt a sandal-
bush;
And when they muster through the scrub for fats in
Hawthornden,
They'll have to let the cattle rip and muster up the
men.

They'll take our places in the hut, the bunks where we have lain,
And smoke in the verandah where we'll never smoke again;
They'll take our saddles from their pegs, our bridles from the wall,
And catch our favourite horses—ah! we'll miss them most of all.
They'll have no banjo music in the station-hut at night—
They'll put the good old songs aside to swear and drink and fight;
They'll have no merry dancing when the off-camp stockmen meet,
And the old boards creak and rattle to the tramp of spur-decked feet.

There'll be races in the township just the same when we're away,
But they'll miss young Harden's pony and your finish on the gray;
And when they meet at settling-time, above the din and noise
They'll be listening for our laughter, and they'll miss the Tringa boys.

And when the new-chum Tringa band goes riding
into town
To take the place of that old band the Banks have
broken down,
The girls will turn their backs on them and never
smile to greet
The men who spur our fancy hacks to prance along
the street.

The Banks are taking charge, old man!—I knew how it
would be;
The flags may fly at half-mast high for death of
Tringadee;
It's another home in ashes, and a name dust-wrapped—
and so
We'll run the horses in to-night and sling the packs and
go!

THE STATION BRAND

Ho! you in the boots and the long-necked spurs,
  You've a nice little hackney there!
I rather fancy that brand of hers—
  Now, what will you take for the mare?
You need not go off on too wide a tack—
  I'm hardly in want of a horse;
And I'm only pricing your chestnut hack
  For the sake of the brand, of course.
I don't know where you were born or bred,
  But I'll give you a stranger's hand
For love of that lean, game, fiery head,
  And the sake of the Tringa brand.

No, thanks; I don't fancy exchanges,
  Besides, she's a bit of a screw,
As old as the Barrier Ranges,
  And shook in the shoulders, too!

Now, what is the use of denial?
  Much better have let things stand—
No, thank you, I want no trial:
  I'm buying the Tringa brand!
I know that she'll carry me fast and far
  In waterless waste or wet,
For never the *T R I and a Bar*
  Was burnt on a bad one yet.

Do I know the brand? Yes, I think I do;
  I've carried it, hell-fire hot,
To the stockyard fence and passed it through
  For many a cleanskin lot;
I've heard it hiss on the burning hide,
  And the short, sharp whinny of pain
As they lifted it off to thrust aside
  Or lay to the lines again.
Do I know the brand? I have watched it streak
  To the front in the mustering days—
But why do I tell you—you've heard it speak,
  And you know what the old brand says!

For ask of the drovers from North of Bourke,
  The Kings of the Overland,
Which are the horses to stand the work:
  They will tell you - the Tringa brand!

And question the mailmen in flood-street met,
  Flogging, down in the mud,
Which are the pearls when the plains are wet:
  They will tell you—the Tringa blood!
And ask the men of the Furthest Back
  What their favourite campers are
In the whirling dust when the stockwhips crack;
  And it's *T R I and a Bar.*

You can have your price!—it's a lot too much
  As horses are selling to-day!
But a man is a fool and acts as such
  When sentiment shows the way;
She's spavined and aged and shoulder-shook,
  Yet I'm not regretting the deal,
For the old brand shows like an open book
  What nothing else can reveal—
The far-off life with its witching charms
  And the glamour of sun and star
In the happy days when our coat-of-arms
  Was *T R I and a Bar!*

OUT OF THE CHAINS

He has toiled in his place since the break of day,
And the collar has left its gall;
When others were faint in the holding clay
And heavy the burden and steep the way
He has taken the weight from all.

Where the sun falls red on the burning plains
From the breast of a quivering sky,
As a poor reward for his honest pains
They have loosed the collar and dropped the chains
And turned him adrift to die.

Though the brown grass waves by his weary feet,
Though the river runs at his side,
He has little desire to drink or eat;
And he crawls away in the scorching heat
With torture at every stride.

And the waggons pass in the whirling dust,
  And the ring of the whip is gone,
And his hope with the human voice is lost,
And the crows come down in an eager host
  With wings that blacken the sun.

Ere the whip-scored hide has ceased to smart
  Or the aching limbs grown numb,
Ere pulses slacken and sense depart,
Ere the hammer stops in the broken heart
  And sobs in the throat are dumb,

Will his thoughts return to the pastures green,
  Of the bygone hours of ease?—
To a golden noon in a summer sheen,
To a river laughing its banks between,
  And the shadow of blackwood trees?—

To the mouthfuls of dewy grass, the rolls
  On the petals of painted flowers?—
To the races run with his comrade foals,
With straggling starts and indefinite goals,
  To shorten the idle hours?

Will he cherish the memory, even now
  Of the touch of a loving hand
That ribboned the lock on his open brow
And fondled the neck that was proud to bow
  With a rose in the forehead-band?

Will he yearn one moment to catch the tone
  Of the voice he loved long since?—
"I never lift whip to my gallant roan;
He works for the voice and the voice alone;
  And he draws till he drops, old Prince!"

"Till he drops!"—the shadows are gathering fast
  To curtain his bed on the plain,
And out of the darkness void and vast
The carrion birds to their foul repast
  Are flying in endless train.

THE MAN WHO STEADIES THE LEAD

He was born in the light of red oaths
And nursed by the drought and the flood,
And swaddled in sweat-lined saddle-cloths
And christened in spur-drawn blood;
He never was burdened with learning,
And many would think him a fool,
But he's mastered a method of "turning"
That never was taught in a school.
His manners are rugged and vulgar,
But he's nuggets of gold in our need,
And a lightning flash in the mulga
Is the Man who Steadies the Lead!

When the stockwhips are ringing behind him
And the brumbies are racing abreast,
It's fifty to one you will find him
A furlong or two from the rest

With the coils of his whip hanging idle,
His eyes on the mob at his side,
And the daintiest touch on the bridle—
For this is the man who can ride!
And the stallions that break for the mallee
Will find he has courage and speed,
For he rides the best horse in the valley—
This stockman that steadies the lead.

When they're fetching in "stores" to the station
Through tangles of broken belar,
And the road is a rough calculation
That's based on the blaze of a star;
When they're quickening through sand-ridge and hollow
And rowels are spattered with red,
And sometimes you've only to follow
The sound of the hoof-beat ahead;
Then we know that he's holding them nor'ward—
We trust in the man and his steed,
As we hear the old brown crashing forward
And his rider's "Wo up!" to the lead.

And again in a journey that's longer,
In a different phase of the game,
Dropping down the long trail to Wodonga
With a thousand or so of the same;

When the blue grass is over our rollers,
And each one contentedly rides,
And even the worst of the crawlers
Are stuffing green grass in their hides;
He is ready to spread them or ring them
Or steady them back on the feed,
And he knows when to stop them or string them—
The stockman that rides in the lead.

But when from the bend in the river
The cattle break camp in the night—
Oh, then is the season, if ever,
We value his service aright!
For we know that if some should be tardy,
And some should be left in the race,
Yet the spurs will be red on "Coolgardie"
As Someone swings out to his place.
The mulga boughs—hark to them breaking
In front of the maddened stampede!
A horse and a rider are taking
Their time-honoured place in the lead!

As an honest, impartial recorder
I'd fain have you all recollect
There are other brave men on the Border
Entitled to every respect;

There's the man that thinks bucking a tame thing,
And rides 'em with lighted cigars ;
And the man who will drive any blame' thing
That ever was hooked to the bars . . .
Their pluck and their prowess are granted,
But all said and done, we're agreed
That the king of 'em all when he's wanted
Is the Man who Steadies the Lead !

HOW THE FIRE QUEEN CROSSED THE SWAMP

The flood was down in the Wilga swamps, three feet
over the mud,
And the teamsters camped on the Wilga range and
swore at the rising flood;
For one by one they had tried the trip, double and
treble teams,
And one after one each desert-ship had dropped to
her axle-beams;
So they thonged their leaders and pulled them round
to the camp on the sandhill's crown,
And swore by the bond of a blood-red oath to wait
till the floods went down.

There were side-rail tubs and table-tops, coaches and
bullock-drays,
Brown with the Barcoo Wonders, and Speed with
the dapple grays

Who pulled the front of his waggon out and left the
rest in the mud
At the Cuttaburra crossing in the grip of the Ninety
flood.
There was Burt with his sixteen bullocks, and never
a bullock to shirk,
Who twice came over the Border line with twelve-
ton-ten to Bourke;
There was Long Dick damning an agent's eyes for
his ton of extra weight,
And Whistling Jim, for Cobb and Co., cursing that
mails were late;
And one blasphemed at a broken chain and howled
for a blacksmith's blood,
And most of them cursed their crimson luck, and all
of them cursed the flood.

The last of the baffled had struggled back and the sun
was low in the sky,
And the first of the stars was creeping out when
Dareaway Dan came by.
There's never a teamster draws to Bourke but has
taken the help of Dan;
There's never a team on the Great North Road can
lift as the big roans can:

Broad-hipped beauties that nothing can stop, leaders
that swing to a cough;
Eight blue-roans on the near side yoked, and eight
red-roans on the off.
And Long Dick called from his pine-rail bunk:
"Where are you bound so quick?"
And Dareaway Dan spoke low to the roans, and
aloud, "To the Swagman's, Dick!"
"There's five good miles," said the giant, "lie to the
front of you, holding mud;
If you never were stopped before, old man, you are
stopped by the Wilga flood.
The dark will be down in an hour or so, there isn't
the ghost of a moon;
So leave your nags in the station grass instead of the
long lagoon!"

But Dan stood up to the leader's head and fondled
the big brown nose:
"There's many a mile in the roan team yet before
they are feed for the crows;
Now listen, Dick-with-the-woman's-heart, a word to
you and the rest:
I've sixteen horses collared and chained, the pick of
the whole wide West,

And I'll cut their throats and leave them here to rot
if they haven't the power
To carry me through the gates of Hell—with seventy
bags of flour !
The light of the stars is light enough; they have
nothing to do but *plough!*
There's never a swamp has held them yet, and a
swamp won't stop them now.
They're waiting for flour at the Swagman's Bend ; I'll
steer for the lifting light ;
There's nothing to fear with a team like mine, and—
I camp in the bend to-night ! "

So they stood aside and they watched them pass in
the glow of the sinking sun,
With straining muscles and tightened chains—
sixteen pulling like one ;
With jingling harness and droning wheels and bare
hoofs' rhythmic tramp,
With creaking timbers and lurching load the Fire
Queen faced the swamp !
She dipped her red shafts low in the slush as a
spoonbill dips her beak,
The black mud clung to the wheels and fell in the
wash of the Wilga creek ;

And the big roans fought for footing, and the
spreaders threshed like flails,
And the great wheels lifted the muddy spume to the
bend of the red float-rails;
And they cheered him out to the westward with the
last of the failing light
And the splashing hoofs and the driver's voice died
softly away in the night;
But some of them prate of a shadowy form that guided
the leader's reins,
And some of them speak of a shod black horse that
pulled in the off-side chains—
How every time that he lifted his feet the waggon
would groan and swing,
And every time that he dropped his head you could
hear the tug-chains ring!

And Dan to the Swagman's Bend came through mud-
spattered from foot to head,
And they couldn't tell which of the roans were blue
and which of the roans were red.
Now this is the tale as I heard it told, and many
believe it true
When the teamsters say in their off-hand way—
"'Twas the Devil that pulled him through!"

THE NEAR-SIDE LEADER

When the gear is on the horses and the knotted trace-chains hooked;
When the last bale's on the waggon and the ropes are twitched and tied;
When the brakes are off the big wheels and the way-bills safely booked,
You can see the old gray leader with his wise head turned aside.
  Does a memory come o'er him
  Of the long stiff road before him,
With the lead-chains never slackened as he holds his team to work,
  Through the box-flats and the gidyas,
  Ninety miles of plain and ridges,
To the white-railed Darling bridges and the silver roofs of Bourke?

Just a whisper from his master and he leans upon
the weight,
And the twenty browns behind him touch the collar
when he moves,
Then the whip rings out a warning, and the under-
carriage grates,
And they bend their backs and lift her from the
well-worn loading grooves.
So they open up the tourney,
And she starts her long, rough journey
Over ninety miles of noonday and the evenings in
between,
And the station-gates have freed her,
With the station men to speed her,
And it's "Buckle down, my leader, on the road you've
often been!"

Now the red dust curls behind her, and the red dust
rolls before,
And from shafter up to leader they are sweat from
head to hip,
And the good ones take the collar and the bad ones
baulk and bore,
But the gray horse strains the harder every time he
hears the whip;

So, by lash and lurid order,
They will swing her through the Border,
With the dust upon her loading making extra weight to pull,
And the drunken township loafer
Staggers blindly from his sofa
Just to see the first team over with the Thurulgoona wool.

O, the camping by the river when the sun is riding low!
O, the shifting of the collars and the dropping of the chains!
And the music of the big bells, as they let the horses go
To their drinking in the river and their feeding on the plains!
So, from camp to camp-fire, daily,
They will battle through Belalie,
Till they leave the plains behind them and the river at their back,
Where the stony hills are showing
There is panting now, and blowing,
But the gray horse keeps them going with the chains that never slack.

So the toe-clips cut the roadway where a thousand hoofs have trod,
While above the gold sun glistens or to West the red sun flames
To the creaking of the waggon and the lurching of the load
And the grinding of the tug-chains in the hooks upon the hames;
  And the leader's heart thumps loudly,
  But he bends his old neck proudly
As he swings them through the bridges, sticking staunchly to his work;
  And I wish the gray could hear him
  When a stranger says, "I'd spare him,
For there's not a horse comes near him in the teams that draw to Bourke!"

O, it's grand to bring the largest loads from Thurulgoona side!
And it's grand to have a leader that the smallest child knows well;
But, if you love an honest horse, when next the ropes are tied
You'll leave him in the bluegrass, for the gray has earned a spell.

He has borne the brunt of battle;
He has led your lagging cattle
With the red galls on his shoulder, yet he never shirked a start;
And 'twere better you should brain him
Ere you burst him up and strain him,
For, just think, each trip you chain him helps to break a willing heart!

THE SILENT SQUADRON

Down the long dream-lanes
At the dead of night,
With gray mists over and mists below,
With loose-held reins
On their horses white
I watch where the silent riders go.

With their heads bent low
And a hoof-stroke dumb
They never turn to the left or right,
And the shadows go
And the shadows come,
But the silent squadron is deadly white.

Should a bit-bar play
Or a saddle creak
It would free the blood of an icy fear,
If a horse should neigh
Or a rider speak
It would lighten the load of my heart to hear.

But the troop rides on
With a measured pace
And touching stirrups that make no sound,
And the stars have shone
On a comrade's face
That is twelve long years in the graveyard ground.

Here are the ends
Of the parted ways—
The long Dead March of the years to be;
And these are the friends
Of the olden days
Taking their last ride silently.

There's an empty space—
They keep my place
In their ghostly ranks; and I catch my breath!
Yet hand to the rein
There are better men
Riding to-night with the Steeds of Death.

THE BROKEN SHOE

LONG years ago—no matter now how long—one fierce December
I was travelling, weak and footsore, on a river road Out Back ;
I was sick at heart and weary of the world, and I remember
How my tucker-bags were empty on that long starvation track.

Oh, the world is wide and bitter to the outcast and the friendless !
But you never know how bitter or how friendless it can be
Till you see the big scrubs stretching to the westward, black and endless,
And the sun-glare and the sand-drift on the silent saltbush sea.

Where among the river timber flashed a silver roof
beside me
I turned from off the treadmill track that leads but
to the grave:
I would face the world's last welcome, were it offered
or denied me:
They could take me in or scorn me—'twas a life to
lose or save.

There were hands held out to meet me, there were
pitying words and kindly,
As they bore beyond the threshold, through the roses,
my poor weight;
And the fever fought them daily, and I lay for long
weeks blindly
Waging war against her sword-blades and the banded
squares of Fate.

Then I woke on New Year's morning to the life that
had grown dearer,
And the brown tide whipped the gum-trees and the
grass was waving green;
And the world was not so harsh, it seemed, to one
pale, friendless shearer,
For I saw glad faces round me, with the sunlight in
between.

And a strong man, gray and rugged, and a white-haired gentle mother,
And a daughter, sweetly beautiful, brown-eyed and raven-haired,
Clasped hands and prayed in thankfulness, soft-voiced with one another,
For the stranger in their household whom the chastening Lord had spared.

Now the world is wild and wilful out beyond the Darling timber,
And the further to the sunset is the nearer Hell, they say;
Is it wonder, then, I cherish in my heart and aye remember
Those who nursed me through the fever as I saw them kneel and pray?

When twice the floods had mustered from the creeks above the Border,
When twice the plains had blistered in the furnace of the drought,
When twice the laughing Spring had come and gone in flowery order,
When the grass was green and waving, and the latest sheds cut-out;

Then I sought the white-roofed homestead by the river, lightly laden
With a few small gifts as tokens of remembrance. It was late
When the old folk came to greet me, and I missed the brown-eyed maiden
When they crossed the rose-grown threshold and the pathway to the gate.

And the old man, worn and aged, had the lines of care and sorrow
Traced deeply on his forehead, and but few the words he said ;
And I saw the bitter burden of a weeping, morn to morrow,
In the sad eyes of the woman as she raised her drooping head.

When the stars were lit and burning, and the crickets softly singing,
Then he led me to the garden, and he spoke in accents strange :
And his eyes would wander vaguely, but his voice had passion's ringing
That had lost its gentle tuning, and I wondered at the change.

So he fashioned his sad story: "When the last year's flood was lifting,
And the dawn of every morning showed a rising of the creek,
When we saw the wreck of homesteads daily past our doorstep drifting—
Oh, the Lord is fierce and cruel!" and dark anger flushed his cheek—

"I was rowing up the river in the old boat, searching vainly
For the few poor sheep God left me"—and his face grew dark again—
"I could hear a 'cooee' ringing down the water, loud and plainly,
And I thanked the Lord who sent me; I believed in such things then.

"And I saw a man's form clinging to a branching gum that gave him
Rest a moment, worn with waiting, cramped and numb with cold and fear,
And I called across the water, and I prayed God I might save him,
But I wish these hands had drowned him ere I brought the hell-fiend here!

"He was weak and starved with hunger, and we nursed him—was it wonder?
And we thanked the Lord in Heaven who had granted us this part:
Hell's curses on him! Pardon me —— he rent my home asunder;
He wrought my daughter's ruin, and he broke her mother's heart.

"He was tall, and straight, and handsome, with the soft ways of the city,
And he spoke of home and mother—what words were these for him?
He sang psalms and read his Bible—and we liked him—more's the pity!
And we almost got to love him when he said he knew our Jim.

"Our Jim, the blue-eyed giant, Mary's brother; he would ply her
With his tales of Jim and shearing, where his wild life first began:
How Jim and he were comrades. But the low cur was a liar;
Our Jim was never mate of his—Jim's honest, and *a man!*

"Well, we learned to like the stranger, and our eyes
were blinded fairly,
And we nursed the viper warmly who would bite us
to the bone,
And our eyes were rudely opened when one spring-
tide morning early
We woke to find the scoundrel and our fastest stock-
horse gone.

"Six hours before I saddled he was racing down the
river;
But I took the girl's roan-chestnut that is faster than
the wind;
No fleet-winged terror fleeter than the fiend before
me—never
Fierce wrath one-half so bitter as the man who rode
behind!

"Across the hill I tracked him, to the river bank and
over,
And there the cur had doubled back to save his
wretched hide;
The watching sun had never waked to see so base a
lover,
The frightened stars had never paled to see such
vengeance ride!

"So I ran the tracks out west to where the Red
Spring road runs nor'ward,
Though the hardness of the surface made it dainty
work to do;
I can track, lad, like a nigger, and I raced the
chestnut forward,
For there's not a road could bluff me off old Stock-
whip's broken shoe!

"I galloped over cane-grass swamps, now madly, now
more slowly;
I raced across the sandhills with dark murder in my
heart,
And with the miles the fierce thoughts grew—the red
resolves unholy:
There's time for him to harbour these who gives a
six-hour start!

"The sun was noon-high in the gums when, at the
Red Spring crossing,
I saw the coward crouching by a dead tree on the
track.
I reined the horse and steadied him, and past his
game head's tossing
Took aim that asks for vengeance, but wins not
honour back.

"I halted but a moment; in that moment passed before me
The vision of his white face and his trembling, lifted hands:
He prayed to me for mercy; then the bitter wrath came o'er me:
'*He gave my girl no mercy, and I'll shoot him where he stands!*'

"Then a voice came whisp'ring softly, 'Mine is vengeance, so the Lord said . . .'
But the madness held me fettered, and I cursed Him at the ford,
And I shouted to the blue skies, 'For a God or devil's word said
Shall I lose my just avenging? *Mine's* the vengeance; d——n the Lord!'

"Then I felt the chestnut tremble, and he reeled and fell beneath me,
And I knew no more that happened till I wakened in the night,
And all the stars of heaven seemed to cluster and enwreath me,
And the cold wind kissed my forehead—and the man was gone from sight.

"And we left our poor girl sleeping by the mulga
trees down yonder,
And the parson said 'The Lord's will!' as he stood
beside her grave . . .
And every word is true, lad. Tell me straight, now,
do you wonder
If I curse this Lord they speak of, who will neither
slay nor save?"

RIDERLESS

A BROKEN bridle trailing,
  A saddle scratched and scarred—
And Brown Bee at the railing
  That rings the station yard;
No stockman sits astride her,
  But, by those flanks afoam,
Wild Terror was the rider
  That lashed the good mare home!

She snorts across the moonlight
  Through nostrils red and wide
The challenge of the unbacked colt
  To those who dare to ride;
She snorts across the moonlight
  Through nostrils wide and red
The terror of a dumb beast
  That has looked upon the dead . . .

His saddle and his bridle
We've softly laid aside,
We'll leave the rough gear idle
Till he comes back to ride ;—
Our eyes are to the ranges,
And when the dawning pales
The brown mare stands and whinnies
With her lean head on the rails.

KINGS OF THE EARTH

We are heathen who worship an idol
We keep for our pleasure and pride,
We are slaves of the saddle and bridle,
Yet kings of the earth when we ride!

It is over the clinging meadows
And the hedges thick and tall,
Where the frost still lies in the shadows
And the boldest ride for a fall;
It is over the stretching upland
Where the breeze is fresh from the sea,
And veiled in spray is the stag at bay
That battles on bended knee.

It is down by the white-flagged courses
In the shimmer of silken wings,
Where the thunder of galloping horses
The blood to the pulses brings:

When your mount goes free to his fences
  And leans to your gentle hold,
And the plaudits loud of the cheering crowd
  Are better than gifts of gold.

It is here, in the southward, under
  The rays of a sun that fall
Where the stockwhip's gathering thunder
  Is music sweetest of all:
Where the "scrubbers" under the dust-clouds
  Are challenged, and caught, and passed,
Though flanks may bleed ere we wheel the lead
  At the wings of the yard at last.

We are heathen who worship an idol
  We keep for our honour and pride;
We are slaves of the saddle and bridle,
  Yet kings of the earth when we ride!

UNBROKEN!

Eyes wild with fear unspoken,
Tossed manes and sweeping tails,
Our thirty head unbroken
Are safe behind the rails;
Hard won from stony ridges
And waving blue-grass plains
By gashes from the gidyas,
Red spurs and foamy reins!

We woke with stars a-cluster
And rode with breaking day,
We've made a right good muster
With not one colt away;
Oh, loth they were at leaving!
And twice they broke for home;
And Blue Light's flanks are heaving,
And Brownlocks' white with foam.

By Snowdon's son—Gray River—
  The best blood in the land!
No finer draft has ever
  Upheld the station brand;
They'll get no chance of hiding,
  Fenced in the Mile-by-Mile;
We won them by hard riding,
  We'll hold them now by guile.

The bay colt's there from Blossom:
  By Jove, the beggar's grown!
The steel-gray out of Possum—
  The best the old mare's thrown!
And here's the brown from Lo-lo—
  The beggar ought to race;
What price that chap for polo
  With the white streak down the face?

That big chap by the cedar,
  Full brother to The Gleam,
We'll mouth him for a leader
  In the boss's slashing team;
Those browns across the corner
  Will make a ripping pair;
That chestnut out of Lorna
  Takes his kicking from the mare.

Jump down there!—what a scatter!
  Get out the ropes and gear;
We have never broken better
  Than the colts we'll break this year;
Look out the bits and rollers,
  The halters and the rest—
This year they'll know our colours
  On the township tracks Out West!

HOW WE WON THE RIBBON

Come and look around my office—
Floors are littered, walls are hung
With the treasures and the trophies
Of the days when I was young;
Rusty spur and snaffle idle,
Polo stick and gun and bridle,
In a sweet confusion flung.

There's my saddle when a rover—
(That's the bridle hanging up)
Queensland-built—a Lachlan drover
Swopped me for a Kelpie pup.
By the Lord, it makes one ponder
When one thinks those spurs up yonder
Helped to win the Mulga Cup!

There's the bar I used on Wyndham
  On the day you watched him "clear"
With the four-in-hand behind him—
  Yet they'll say it's too severe.
See that bunch of faded ribbon?
It belongs to Jock McKibbon,
  But he always leaves it here.

And there's just a little story
  Hanging to that bunch of blue;
I'm not claiming any glory
  When I spin the yarn to you—
Yarns go best when pipes are glowing;
Here's the "Capstan"; set her going—
  And remember this is *true.*

Pearl of price for hunter's duty
  Was the gray mare Heart's Desire,
With the Snowdon's strength and beauty
  And a dash of Panic fire;
And I never knew her failing
At a dyke, a ditch, or paling—
  She could jump her height and higher.

Now, the rider courted throwing
  Who would touch her with the spurs
When the Snowdon mare got going
  With that sweeping stride of hers;
She was restless, hot, and heady;
She had smashed one man already,
  And the fright had made her worse.

But her owner, nothing fearing,
  Brave as ever man could be,
Saw the yearly Show was nearing
  While he nursed a crippled knee;
So he called me, did McKibbon:
"We've a mortgage on the ribbon—
  Will you ride the mare for me?"

. . . . .

They had sent their speedy sprinters
  Round the fences, one by one,
And the air was thick with splinters
  Till you couldn't see the sun;
Such a striking, swerving, baulking!
Saddles empty, riders walking!
  Not a round was cleanly done.

And the gray mare, Heart's Desire,
  Stood and watched and seemed to know;
Fretted when they galloped by her,
  Tossed her lean head to and fro;
Then they called to me, "Get ready!"
And McKibbon whispered, "Steady . . !"
  But the crowd yelled, "*Let her* GO ! !"

Now, beyond the five-foot palings,
  As I set the mare a-swing,
From below the grand-stand railings
  Someone's child crept in the ring,
And we never saw the youngster
Till the mare was right against her
  Shortening stride to make the spring!

So I loosed her head and drove her
  With the red spurs ripping wild;
It was take the lot—and *over*—
  Or God help the tiny child!
And I watched as though in dreaming
Where the snow-white dress was gleaming,
  And the babe looked up and smiled!

But I knew the mare I rode on—
  Could a leap be found too far
For the quarters of old Snowdon
  And the heart of Blazing Star?
Here she had the chance to show me—
And the shod-hoofs flashed below me,
  Half a yard above the bar!

Then the dust-clouds! *Had we cleared her?*
  Then the light shock as we land,
Then—the crowd stood up and cheered her
  On the ring fence and the stand;
But my brain was sick and spinning
And I slung my chance of winning
  As I took the mare in hand.

But they crowded round to hold her,
  And they tied the badge of blue
In a knot upon her shoulder
  That they dared me to undo!
So I left the prize upon her,
And I think she won the honour
  When she saved the lives of two.

. . . . .

And I journey Life's gay road on,
But I linger when I pass
Where the best and gamest Snowdon
Takes her last sleep in the grass
With the wattle-boughs above her;
And when others toast a lover
Then I pledge her in my glass.

Now, they reckon me a rider
In the showyard and the shire,
But I never faced a wider
Jump, a tougher or a higher
Since I rode for Jock McKibbon
On the day we won the ribbon
With the gray mare Heart's Desire.

OTHER VERSES

Some take no heed of any future day
But kiss Time's hand while wearing yet his bonds,
Dreaming their young full-blooded life away
Among Life's lotus-ponds.

And some there are who gird them shield and sword,
War dawn and noon, fight the red sunset down
To fall when night falls, with the same reward
Death's dark-hued cypress crown.

Ah! when Death's hand our own warm hand hath ta'en
Down the dark aisles his sceptre rules supreme,
God grant the fighters leave to fight again
And let the dreamers dream!

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HABET !

Down! And the world's war-squadron splashes
  Past, loose-reined, in the blood and the mire;
Brown arms sweep and the bared steel flashes
  On to the goal of the World's desire.
Down! By the war-steed's hot hoofs cowering,
  Broken the sword arm, bent the sword,
And away to the front leap the sabres showering
  Blows for the Hell-hearth, blows for the Lord!

Did he clutch at the moon for jewel
  To bind on his bosom and wear?
Did he fight with a Fate too cruel
  Or follow a face too fair?
What does it matter the reason why!
  He is down; and it's little the world will care
As it sweeps in a foam-fret by.

Down ! Weeps the moon, and he never wore it.
  Down ! And the stars mourn into the mist.
Fate's red weal is across his forehead ;
  Somebody's face has never been kissed !
Flushes the dawn, and one vulture-speck
  Spires and spins in a reeling sky ;—
Down ! And it's little the World will reck
  As it rides red-rowelled by.

THE WORLD BEYOND

A Poet stood in the red day-dawn,
  And the dawn was more to his gifted eyes
Than a songbird's call and a flush on the lawn
  When the night winds drop and the last star dies;
For he saw the Goddess of all sweet song
  Clothed in a vesture of infinite light,
He heard the challenge of Right to Wrong,
  The trumpet blast of the world-old fight.

A Painter stood in the golden noon,
  And to him the world was something more
Then a sea of light in a slumbrous swoon
  On the golden sands of a splendid shore;
Far out and beyond the gold and gray,
  The silver cloud and the sweep of blue,
He could see the bright lights quiver and play—
  The wonder of Italy, known and new.

A Lover watched in the evening light,
  And the world was something greater to him
Than a day-death grand and a sunset bright,
  A sweeping of shadows, a twilight dim;
For he saw far over the drifting years
  A maiden form in the sunset stand,
And his gray eyes filled with a mist of tears
  For the soft white sake of an unclasped hand.

And so for the wide world never in vain
  Blossoms a day-dawn, a noon, or a night,
For somewhere out farther than these again
  There reddens the gleam of a Hope-born light;
And the meanest man on the round world's rim—
  Poet or Painter though never he be—
Has seen for a moment with eyes grown dim
  The light that was never on land or sea!

NORTHWARD TO THE SHEDS

THERE'S a whisper from the regions out beyond the Barwon banks;
There's a gathering of the legions and a forming of the ranks;
There's a murmer coming nearer with the signs that never fail,
And it's time for every shearer to be out upon the trail.
They must leave their girls behind them and their empty glasses, too,
For there's plenty left to mind them when they cross the dry Barcoo;
There'll be kissing, there'll be sorrow such as only sweethearts know,
But before the noon to-morrow they'll be singing as they go—

For the Western creeks are calling
And the idle days are done,
With the snowy fleeces falling
And the Queensland sheds begun!

There is shortening of the bridle, there is tightening of the girth,
There is fondling of the idol that they love the best on earth;
Northward from the Lachlan River and the sun-dried Castlereagh,
Outward to the Never-Never ride the ringers on their way.
From the green bends of the Murray they have run their horses in,
For there's haste and there is hurry when the Queensland sheds begin;
On the Bogan they are bridling, they are saddling on the Bland,
There is plunging and there's sidling – for the colts don't understand

That the Western creeks are calling,
And the idle days are done,
With the snowy fleeces falling
And the Queensland sheds begun!

They will camp below the station, they'll be cutting
peg and pole
Rearing tents for occupation till the calling of the
roll;
And it's time the nags were driven, and it's time to
strap the pack,
For there's never license given to the laggards on the
track.
Hark the music of the battle! it is time to bare our
swords:
Do you hear the rush and rattle as they tramp along
the boards?
They are past the pen doors picking light-woolled
weaners one by one;
I can hear the shear blades clicking, and I know the
fight's begun!

LIFE'S OVERLAND

Grey-lying miles to the nor'ward of Nor'ward,
Red-leaping leagues to the westward of West,
Further than keenest of sight follows forward,
Further than boldest of hearts ever guessed;
Still with its secret to Man unimparted,
Still with its beckoning wealth unattained,
Lies the dim goal that has Never been Charted,
Down the long Road that has Never been Chained.

Day after day, and from morrow to morrow,
Pointing the way where the wide road begins,
Sweep the red scorpion scourges of Sorrow,
Lashing her children out West for their sins;
Beefwood and whitewood, and redgum and wilga,
Lead them and goad them, and guide them and guard,
Till hidden in tangle of sandal and mulga,
The gates to the East and the Southward are barred.

Westward and Nor'ward! and fainter behind them
The roll of the waggons, the roar of the whips,
The towering red dust-storms that waltz down and wind them,
The blue mocking mirage that lies to their lips;
Beyond the last camp of the furthest-west drover,
Beyond the last team-track, the last rotting steer,
Beyond the last foot-pad the camels crossed over,
Beyond the lone grave of the last pioneer.

Westward and Westward! Out past the last horror
Of thirst and starvation, of lorn lives and lost,
The bleaching white bones of the boldest explorer,
The scrubs and the plains that have never been crossed,—
Where the heat haze no longer in mockery dances,
Where no more the sand-drift whirls brown on the blue,
Where the pitying Sun lays at rest his red lances,
With white flags of truce where his war banner flew.

The last birds have waked them—they sleep now no longer!
The last dark has lifted—they take no more rest!
For the aching feet heal and the tired heart grows stronger
As every league bears them a league to the West.

Gold ! Did they hear her sweet voice as they started ?
Now she is dumb to them, scorned and disdained,
And their goal is a Goal that has Never been Charted ;
Their route is a Road that has Never been Chained.

Westward and—Homeward ! Brown hands at the
back of them ;
Far in the distance white hands—and the rest ;
One by one, outward, we lose the last track of them,
All the world wending its way to the West ;
One after one, till the last shall have started,
Yet no more the last than the first shall have gained
In the lore of the Goal that has Never been Charted,
Down the long Road that has Never been Chained.

AT THE BACK O' BOURKE!

WHERE the mulga paddocks are wild and wide,
That's where the pick of the stockmen ride—
At the Back o' Bourke!
Under the dust-clouds dense and brown,
Moving Southward by tank and town,
That's where the Queensland mobs come down—
Out at the Back o' Bourke!

Over the Border to and fro,
That's where the footsore swagmen go—
At the Back o' Bourke!
Sick and tired of the endless strife,
Nursing the bones of a wasted life
Where all the sorrows of Earth are rife—
Out at the Back o' Bourke!

Whether the plains are deep or dry,
That's where the struggling teams go by—
At the Back o' Bourke!
North and Southward, in twos and threes,
Bullocks and horses down to the knees,
Waggons dipped to the axle-trees—
Out at the Back o' Bourke!

That's the land of the lying light
And the cruel mirage dancing bright—
At the Back o' Bourke!
That's where the shambling camel train
Crosses the Western ridge and plain,
Loading the Paroo clips again
Out at the Back o' Bourke!

That's the land of the wildest nights,
The longest sprees and the fiercest fights—
At the Back o' Bourke!
That's where the skies are brightest blue,
That's where the heaviest work's to do,
That's where the fires of Hell burn through—
Out at the Back o' Bourke!

That's where the wildest floods have birth
Out of the nakedest ends of Earth—
At the Back o' Bourke!
Where the poor men lend and the rich ones borrow ;
It's the bitterest land of sweat and sorrow—
But if I were free I'd be off to-morrow,
Out at the Back o' Bourke!

THE SONG OF SONGS

LET others chant of battle and such wreaths as Glory gave;
I would rather sing the praises of the dew that dips the daisies,
Of the wind that stirs the wattle and the foam that flecks the wave.

When others sing the Nation and the Flag that sweeps the seas,
Let them leave me to deliver the old message of the river
And the true interpretation of the wind's voice in the trees.

For when the drums are calling men to Honour and Renown,
Turning in their dreamy slumbers they are swayed by softer numbers,
Music of a dewdrop falling or a dead leaf drifting down.

And when the battle rages and the grey smoke dims the skies,
  There's a Voice that makes them listen till the gathering teardrops glisten
And the Love that lit the ages brings the roselight to their eyes.

AT THE BEND O' THE CREEK.

Here is roaring flood in Winter
When the storm-flag flies,
And the quick-fire lightnings splinter
Gold from night-black skies,
And the rain-clouds gather, breaking
Close upon the box-tree shaking
Like a lost soul shivering, quaking
With a fear that never dies.

Here is sandy waste in Summer
Where the Drought has lain,
Stifling hope for every comer
From the hell-hot plain ;
When the footsore cattle quicken
At the scent where last drops thicken,
Turning back to faint and sicken
In the dust-dry grass again.

Where the river bends to Nor'ward,
With the dark floods done,
And the Spring flower's flaunting forward
In the first Spring sun,—
Where the angry Winter torrent
Laden with some tree's death-warrant
Left the brown stem 'thwart the current,
In the dead-branch arms lay One

Cold and still, without a motion
Save that in the tide
Rocked he as a wreck in ocean
Rocks from side to side ;
Silent as the trunk above him,
Resting where the ripples drove him
In the bed the flood-wash wove him,
With a naked bough for bride.

Halts the brown hawk for a moment
At the corpse's head,
Shakes the pearl drops from his raiment,
Heedless of the dead ;
Down the river westward winging,
Pinions broad to sunbeams flinging,
Gone ! . . . the birds take up their singing
Where they left the song unsaid.

Stoops the snowy crane to listen
On the sombre tree,
And her drooping feathers glisten
White as white can be;
Down the wind the wild fowl streaming
Catch a glimpse of whiter gleaming,
Wheel aside with frightened screaming
From the horror that they see.

Life and Death, the dead and living!—
None the woe to speak;
And the sun drops westward giving
Bloodstains to the creek;
And the sun-fires gleam and glower
As the life-fires leap and lower,
And the river runs no slower
Though a waiting heart should break!

WEST OF THE WORLD

West of the World all red suns sleep
  On a fleecy carpet of crimson cloud,
And the weary winds from the eastward creep
To their shining goal on the western steep
  In the golden arms of the starry crowd—
    West of the World!

West of the World all true hearts ride
  To a further bourne than the best have trod,
Till they cross the last creek gleaming wide
And wave their hands from the last divide
  Ere they drop their load at the feet of God—
    West of the World!

West of the World all dead hopes drift
  On the heaving heart of the hiding Day
To the clinging shadows that show no rift,
With a lingering step that is all too swift
  For the eyes that follow their trackless way—
    West of the World!

A SCOTCH NIGHT

If you chance to strike a gathering of half-a dozen
friends
When the drink is Highland whusky or some chosen
Border blends,
And the room is full of speirin and the gruppin' of
brown han's,
And the talk is all of tartans and of plaidies and of
clans,—
You can take things douce and easy, you can judge
you're going right,
For you've had the luck to stumble on a wee Scotch
night!

When you're pitchforked in among them in a sweeping sort of way
As "anither mon an' brither" from the Tweed or from
the Tay;

When you're taken by the oxter and you're couped
into a chair
While someone slips a whusky in your tumbler unaware,—
Then the present seems less dismal and the future fair
and bricht,
For you've struck Earth's grandest treasure in a guid
Scots nicht!

When you hear a short name shouted and the same
name shouted back
Till you think in the confusion that they've *all* been
christened Mac;
When you see a red beard flashing in the corner by
the fire,
And a giant on the sofa who is six-foot three or
higher,—
Before you've guessed the colour and before you've
gauged the height
You'll have jumped at the conclusion it's a braw
Scotch night

When the red man in the corner puts his strong voice
to the proof
As he gives *The Hundred Pipers*, and the chorus lifts
the roof;

When a chiel sings *Annie Laurie* with its tender, sweet refrain
Till the tears are on their eyelids and—the drinks come round again;
When they chant the stirring war-songs that would make the coward fight,—
Then you're fairly in the middle of a wee Scotch night!

When the plot begins to thicken and the band begins to play;
When every tin-pot chieftain has a word or two to say;
When they'd sell a Queensland station for a sprig of native heath;
When there's one Mac on the table and a couple underneath;
When half of them are sleeping and the whole of them are tight,—
You will know that you're assisting at a (*hic!*) Scotch night!

When the last big bottle's empty and the dawn creeps gray and cold,
And the last clan-tartan's folded and the last d——d lie is told;

When they totter down the footpath in a brave, unbroken line,
To the peril of the passers and the tune of *Auld Lang Syne*;
You can tell the folk at breakfast as they watch the fearsome sicht,
"They have only been assisting at a braw Scots nicht!"

"ABSENT FRIENDS!"

"Absent Friends!" There are brought to our mind again
The scent of the buddah-bush after the rain;
The dawn in the eastward, the death of the stars,
The wet grass that reaches the cold stirrup bars;
The beat of the horse-hoofs that waken the day;
The jest and the laughter that shorten the way!
So Past with Present gaily blends,
And merrily, with three times three,
We drink to "Absent Friends!"

"Absent Friends!" How those words in a wondrous wise
Can conjure the lovelight in beautiful eyes;
The sound of her voice that was tender and sweet,
The trail of her robes and the fall of her feet;

The moods that could move us to joy or to tears
In the Love of our youth in the long-ago years!
And each one now his greeting sends,
As earnestly, with three times three,
We toast our "Absent Friends!"

"Absent Friends!"—And a home that is over the sea;
White snow on the uplands, white rime on the tree;
The faces we cherish, whate'er be our lot;
The clasp of the hands will be never forgot;
The friends of our boyhood who gather and pass
In the misty reflection of Memory's glass!
Our heart across the ocean wends,
And loyally, with three times three,
We toast our "Absent Friends!"

"Absent Friends!"—The lost legion that lies in the grave;
The friends who were false and the friends we forgave,—
Whose words had the edge of the enemy's knife,
To torture the heart and to poison the life;—
The friends who lay dying and never could know
That we loved at the last as we loved long ago!
So each across his wine-cup bends,
And silently, and tearfully,
We pledge our "Absent Friends!"

THE MARCH OF THE FLOOD

THERE's a whisper away on the Queensland side
Of the Barwon a banker, the Warrego wide
Spread from range to red range; of the siege of a town,
Of farms that are wasted and cattle that drown,
Of a trackless road and a bridgeless sea,
And grey miles measured from tree to tree—
And the people gather at gate and rail
For the latest news by the Darling mail.

Through all the merry daylight
  Long leagues behind her fall
Till golden turns to grey light
  And wedding-robe to pall;
Above her rolling thunder
  The shrieking parrots fly,
And the bush-world waits to wonder
  When the Darling mail goes by!

Through all the night she spurns the ground,
Her headlights shame the stars,
The rolling dust-cloud wraps her round
From ledge to leading bars;
And like some half-roused sleeper
Stands each gaunt-armed gum aghast,
And the shadows gather deeper
When the Darling mail goes past!

She takes the fearsome message down
By reach and point and bend,
And camp and farm and river town
Will hail her as a friend;
For comes she not as horsemen ride
Who ride a race to win?
What wonder if they crowd beside
When the Darling mail comes in!

And close behind is the fierce Flood King:
In the pride of his strength he comes
Where the tangled masses of drift-weed swing
Like dead men up in the gums;
He sings the pæan of curbless might,
The song of a broken chain,
And he rides himself in the foremost fight
With the scourge of a loose-held rain.

He throws an arm to the Southward now,
  Now an arm to the golden West,
And the circled lives to the bidding bow
  And are lost on his tawny breast ;
And day by day as he thunders by
  There is ground to be captive led,
And night by night where the lowlands lie
  Are the wings of his army spread.

There's never the stem of a bank-fed tree
  For the touch of his hand too tall,
And he leaves his brand for the world to see
  On the hut and the homestead wall ;
There's never a star in the midnight sky
  Or a sunbeam crossing the morn
But has heard the boast of his battle-cry
  And the threat of his bugle-horn.

And down where the Queen of the River lies girt with her garland of green
The toilers have heard it and tremble, whose wealth is the life of the Queen ;
In the hush of the evening they hear his low beat on the shield of the shore
And stand to the dam and the earthwork : they know it his challenge of yore !

And the stockmen ride out in the dawnlight by billabong, runner and creek
To gather the sheep and the cattle wherever his war-notes speak;
And the blood will be red on the rowel, the sun will be low in the west
Before they have left them in safety to camp on the red hill's crest.

And so we shall live and suffer so long as the big rains come
With their ruin and wreck for many, their danger and death for some,
Till we go from the Culgoa and Darling to camp on a drier shore
Where the Warrego out in his warpaint shall harry our homes no more!

"GOD-SPEED!"

BECAUSE we've waked the morning-stars
Together, June to June;
Because our spurs and stirrup bars
Have clashed the same old tune;
Because we've drawn one honour-line
And held one cross and creed:
You will not lay your hand in mine
Without a last "God-speed!"

Because we've ridden knee to knee
In lists against the world,
And followed up one destiny
Beneath one flag unfurled;
Because we've lived, a little space,
One life in word and deed:
You will not meet me face to face
Without a last "God speed!"

Because one woman came between—
  As women often will—
Because we thought one girl a queen;
  Because we think so still;
Because no mortal power can say
  How far may True Love lead:
You will not say "Good-bye!" to-day—
  "Good-bye!" without "God-speed!"

Because we've watched the shadows fall,
  Together on the plains—
When all the night was musical
  With bells and hobble-chains;
Because we've gossiped round one blaze,
  Agreed and disagreed:
Old Comrade, for the olden days,
  You'll wish your mate "God-speed!"

A WIND FROM THE WEST

The Wind that fires the blood
  Came leaping in from Westward,
Over stone and stake and stud,
  With the roar of reeling dust-wrack
And the moan of lifting flood.

The Wind that knows no chains
  Came in from Westward, laden
With the incense of the plains,
  With the breath of furnace-portals,
And the reek of camel-trains—

Brought the promise of the West;
  And they hailed her through the mountains
With the honours of a guest,
  For the gold that clasped her girdle
And the gold that crossed her breast.

Oh, a Wind came in from Westward, blowing fetterless and free,
With a wail of weeping women and their children at their knee,
With a dirge of empty saddles from the Lachlan to the Sea.
And the naked West Wind shivered, "I have passed them on the way—
The white bones all uncovered to the scornful gaze of Day—
And I wrapped the red sands round them, and I kissed them as they lay."

ABANDONED SELECTIONS

On the crimson breast of the sunset
  The Gray Selections lie,
And their lonely, grief-stained faces
  Are turned to a pitiless sky ;
They are wrinkled and seamed with drought-fire
  And wound at the throat with weeds,
They sob in the aching loneness
  But never a passer heeds.

I pity you, Gray Selections,
  As I pass you by in the light,
And I turn again with the shadows
  To take your hand in the night ;
In homesteads and yards deserted
  'Tis little the world can see,
But the wail of your endless sorrow
  Throbs under the moon to me

I come to you, Gray Selections,
When the crickets gather and croon,
An hour at the back of the sunset,
An hour in advance of the moon;
How eager they are to whisper
Their tale as they hear me pass!
Twenty at once in the oak trees,
Ten at a time in the grass.

The night winds are chanting above you
A dirge in the cedar trees
Whose green boughs groan at your shoulder,
Whose dead leaves drift to your knees;
You cry, and the curlews answer;
You call, and the wild dogs hear;
Through gaps in the old log-fences
They creep when the night is near.

I stand by your fenceless gardens
And weep for the splintered staves;
I watch by your empty ingles
And mourn by your white-railed graves:
I see from your crumbling doorways
The whispering white forms pass,
And shiver to hear dead horses
Crop-cropping the long gray grass.

Where paddocks are dumb and fallow
And wild weeds waste to the stars
I can hear the voice of the driver,
The thresh of the swingle-bars ;
I can hear the hum of the stripper
That follows the golden lanes,
The snort of the tiring horses,
The clink of the bucking chains.

It is night ; but I see the smoke-wreaths
Float over the dancing haze ;
I can hear the jackass laughing
When South winds rustle the maize ;
I can catch the axes' ringing,
And out on the range's crown
I can hear the red fires roaring
And the great trees thundering down.

I pity you, Gray Selections,
Your hearths as cold as a stone,
The days you must pass unaided,
The nights you must brave alone ;
But most when the wailing curlews
Call over the drear lagoon,
And out of the ring-barked timber
Comes blazing the red, red moon.

They fought for you, Gray Selections,
The battle of long dry years,
Through seedtimes of sweat and sorrow
To harvests of hunger and tears;
You turned from the lips that wooed you,
And Justice, awake on her throne,
For sake of those brave hearts broken,
Is watching you break your own!

"THE MEN WHO BLAZED THE TRACK!"

Since the toasts for the absent are over,
  And duly we've pledged in our wine
Our Land, and our Friends, and our Lover,
  Here's a toast for you, comrades o' mine:
To the fighting band that won the land
  From the bitterest wastes out-back!
From hut and hall to the kings of all—
  "The Men Who Blazed the Track!"

They rode away into the forest
  In mornings gold-studded with stars,
And the song of the leaders was chorused
  To the clinking of rowels and bars;
They fought for the fame of the Islands
  And struck for the Width of the World,
They fashioned new roads in the silence
  And flags in the fastness unfurled.

Their tents in the evening would whiten
  The scrub, and the flash of their fires
Leap over the shadows to brighten
  The way of Ambition's desires;
By the axe-marks we followed their courses,
  For scarcely the ashes remain,
And the tracks of the men and the horses
  Are hidden by dust-storm and rain.

The seasons from June to December
  Are buried and born as of old,
But the peoples have ceased to remember
  Who won them the laurels they hold;
Yet sometimes the North wind comes bringing
  Those keener of hearing and sight
The music of lost axes ringing,
  The beat of lost hoofs in the night.

Our pride is the path of our fathers,
  Our hope's in the sons of our home,
And wherever our nation foregathers
  Our nation is foremost to roam;
But the valleys that smile to our tillage,
  The hills where our banners unfold,
Were won by the men of the village
  And bought with their axes of old.

And we only ride with the flowing tide
As we follow the blazed line back,
So we'll drink the toast of the vanguard host,
And "The Men Who Blazed the Track!"

VITA BREVIS

Our Life is but a moment:
One sheen of silk and pearls,
One dance between the daylights
With a certain girl of girls;
One feast of burning kisses,
One blast of Passion's breath—
And Life is but a moment
That cheats the hand of Death!

Our Life is but a moment:
One sweep of silken wings,
One thunder on the greensward,
One snatch of bridle rings;
One struggle for the pride of place,
One crash of splintered rails—
And Life is but a moment
Before the sunlight fails!

O, Life is but a moment
  For holding soft white hands,
Or flying four-foot fences
  While the cheering rocks the stands ;
So take Love's gift of kisses—
  Or Sport's, in Love's despite—
For Life is but a moment,
  And after it the Night !

THE TRUEST FRIEND

I HAD a comrade tried and true,
Shoulder to shoulder we fought life through;
And whoever spoke light of his name to me
Had a foe to face and a sword to flee;
I'd have staked my life on the grip of his hand—
But swords get broken and troops disband!

I had a lover to fondle and prize,
With the kindest heart and the truest eyes:
I wore her scarf on the tourney ground;
I pledged her name when the toasts went round,
I'd have sworn to her honour before them all—
But snowdrifts tarnish and bright stars fall!

I have a mother, God bless the name!
All beauty wedded to all fair fame:
I have lined her brow with the wish unheard;
I have wounded her heart with the careless word;
But I know that her love to the last is sure—
For hills are steadfast and seas endure!

AULD LANG SYNE

O, IT'S southward from Southampton! and she takes the Channel gay,
But many a heart is bleeding as she stands across the bay;
And it may be just a parting where we've known a hundred more,
Yet many a heart is breaking as the tender swings ashore;
And the handkerchiefs are waving, ship to steamer, line to line,
And a wail's upon the water in the words of *Auld Lang Syne.*

O, it's misty in the Channel and it's stormy in the Bay,
And the lights are dropping backward as she leaves them east away;

And she steadies in blue water where the sunny
islands swoon,
With the sailors singing forward, and the guests in
the saloon;
And they'll sing the old songs over from the Gib Rock
to the Line,
But they cannot drown the music of *The Days of Auld
Lang Syne!*

O, she's round the Austral headlands and she's rocking
through the Rip,
While all her throbbing engines drum the triumph of
the trip;
And it's gently through the shipping, and it's slowly
to the Quay,
And the band has started playing this, the dearest
tune to me;
And they're streaming down the gangway with a
farewell to the brine,
And we leave her as we joined her, to the strains of
Auld Lang Syne.

We have heard the ringing chorus shake the iron on
the roofs,
While outside the bridles jingle to the stamp of
restless hoofs;

We have sped—how many comrades!—from the homestead and the hall,
Watched them fading in the silence to the grandest march of all;
While some hearts were beating proudly to the lilt of every line,
And some others nearly breaking for the sake of *Auld Lang Syne.*

We have sung it o'er the last glass when the morn was breaking gray,
Hands crossed and double chorus in the old time honoured way;
We have sung it in our exile till the heartleap and the croon
Brought us back the brown hills' whisper and the nodding blue-bells' tune;
And the old, old loves are toasted in our cups of brimming wine
While our hearts beat out the music to the words of *Auld Lang Syne.*

It has marked us many partings, it has cost us countless tears,
It has brought us hopes unanswered from the dimness of the years;

It is shaded with Life's sorrow, it is crossed with broken bands,
And the bitterness of kisses and the grief of parting hands —
But so long as Earth has music, and so long as red stars shine,
We shall gather and go outward to the tune of Auld Lang Syne

IN TOWN

WHERE the smoke-clouds scarcely drift
And the breezes seem to sleep,
Where the sunbeams never lift
Half the gloom of alleys deep,
Comrades! must we languish ever,
Beat our hearts against the bars
While the vine-trees kiss the river
And the ranges greet the stars?
There are stormy tints and tender
In the pictures that we pass—
But it's O, for day-dawn's splendour
And the dewdrops in the grass!

Though the old life fades behind us,
Though the new life leaps before,
Old-time spells are strong to bind us
Yearning for our yokes of yore;

In the whirl of toil and duty,
In the pride of pomp and power,
We can find no grander beauty
Than the red West's bridal dower;
There is music in the rattle
Of the horse-hoofs down the street—
But it's O, for ringing cattle
And the thunder of their feet!

Wanton Pleasure laughs beside us
Where the life-streams ebb and flow,
Folly's cap and bells deride us,
Nodding close to Want and Woe;
Lordly pageants round us glisten,
At our feet Life's joys are cast,
But we have no heart to listen
With the Bush-wind whispering past;
Silver nights of love may hold us
Till we half forget the stars—
But it's O, for foam-white shoulders
And the clink of snaffle-bars!

BEYOND COOLGARDIE

THEY are fighting beyond Coolgardie, dusty and worn and brown,
Leading the outward legion from dawn till the sun goes down:
Under their blue sky-banner, standing true to their guns,
Singly and shoulder to shoulder, brothers and sires and sons.

They are faint in the burning noonday, and weary when day is dead;
They have never a thought of resting till Hope from their hearts has fled;
They are toiling—some for a sweetheart, and some for a home and wife;
And many are striving for riches, and some are fighting for life!

They are dying beyond Coolgardie in sight of their
untouched prize,
With no one to break Death's tidings, and no one to
close their eyes;
They lie in the scrub and the sand-wreath, with never
a stone to mark
The grave where the bush-crows gather and the dingo
crosses at dark.

*They are reading the news by the slush-lamps and under
the chandeliers,*
*And the words of the dazzling message are blurred with
the readers' tears;*
*They are praying, away to the Eastward—mothers and
daughters and wives—*
*Asking no golden harvest, but only their loved ones'
lives!*

DESERTED

This is the homestead – the still lagoon
Kisses the foot of the garden fence,
Shimmering under a silver moon
In a midnight silence, cold and tense;
Vines run wild on the old verandah,
Holding their arms to us standing by;
Garden paths where we used to wander
Carry the bush-grass rank and high.

Here and there has a blossom stayed
Out of the wreck of the passing years,
But these will wither, for flowers must fade
Whose only water is sea-salt tears.
There are ghosts in the garden wildernesses
And gliding wraiths at the water-side,
Murmur of voices and rustle of dresses—
Shadow-life that has never died.

The stockyard is empty and dim and drear;
Here and there is a gap in the rails,
But I can see as we stand anear
Moving steeds when the daylight fails—
I see as I stand at the slip-rails dreaming
Merry riders that mount and meet,
Sun on the saddles gleaming, gleaming,
Red dust wrapping the horses' feet.

The world is silent under the stars,
And yet there comes to my ear alone
The tiny clink of the snaffle-bars
As the eager heads are upward thrown;
And the sound of the muffled hoof-beat after
Strikes like a hammer on heart and brain,
And the faint, far echo of drifting laughter
Wakens the strength of a sleeping pain.

Come, come away from the lonely home
Softly, softly as mourners tread;
The world is wide; there is space to roam
Without awaking the sleeping dead.
Till the last of the scattered flowers shall wither
The last of the stockyard-rails decay,
Till the old walls crumble and fall together
The ghosts will move in the moonlight gray

THE FILLING OF THE SWAMPS

Hurrah for the storm-clouds sweeping!
  Hurrah for the driving rain!
The dull Earth out of her sleeping
  Is wakened to life again.
There are mirrors of crystal shining
  Whenever the cloud-wrack breaks,
And grass-clad banks are twining
  A wreath for the fairy lakes—
Lakes that are links in an endless chain,
  For the water is out in the swamps again!

Hurrah for the red-gums standing
  So high on the range above!
Hurrah for the she-oaks bending
  So low to the wave they love!

Hurrah for the reed-stems slender!
  Hurrah for the shade they fling
For the curve of the cygnet's splendour,
  The sheen of the black duck's wing!
Hurrah for the clouds and the glorious rain—
  The water is out in the swamps again!

Hurrah for the laughing water,
  The songs that the streamlets sing!
Whish! the teal duck's mate has sought her
  With a stroke of his mottled wing!
Hurrah for the deepening shallows,
  The ibises eagle-eyed,
The dash of the purple swallows
  To bury their breasts in the tide!
Woe! it is woe to the Drought-King's reign!
  The water is out in the swamps again!

BLACK SHEEP

They shepherd their Black Sheep down to the ships,
Society's banned and cursed;
And the boys look back as the old land dips—
Some with a reckless laugh on their lips,
And some with a prayer reversed.

And it's Goodbye, England! and Goodbye, Love.
And maybe 'tis just as well
When a man fall short of his Heaven above
That he drop to the uttermost Hell.

And the anchor lifts and the sails are set:
Now God to your help, Black Sheep!
For the gay world laughs "They will soon forget!"
But fired in the embers of old regret
The brand of the world bites deep.

They turn their Black Sheep over the side
   To land on a stranger's shores ;
To drift with the cities' human tide,
Or wander away where the rovers ride
   And the flagless legion wars.

And Hope for some is a broken staff
   And for others a golden stair,
Who live for the echo of Love's low laugh
Or Somebody's face in a photograph,
   Or a coil of Somebody's hair.

And some that have carried a parting gift
   May kiss it and fling it away
Far over the clouds that no winds lift
To follow where our dead hopes drift
   And rest where dead hopes may.

They bury the Black Sheep out in the Bush,
   And bury them none too deep
On the cattle camps and the last gold rush,
And the grasses grow over them green and lush
   And the bush-winds sing them to sleep.

And it's Goodbye, Struggle ! and Goodbye, Strife !
   And maybe 't is just as well
When a man goes down in the Battle of Life
   That he shorten his road to Hell !

THE COMING HOME

The light we follow through a mist of tears
Is lost when close at hand. O ye who roam!
There is no pity in the passing years,
And only sadness in the coming home.

When winter storms have broke a father's strength
And Age his stamp upon the shoulders set,
When light in those dear eyes has failed at length
That meet our own so true and kindly yet,
There is but sadness in the coming home.

When Care has followed his relentless plough
To mark the furrows that will last for aye
Over the softness of a mother's brow,
When Time has withered all the brown locks gray,
There is but sadness in the coming home.

When trees have taller grown and gardens changed
And meadows are not as they used to be,
When woods seem smaller where our boy feet ranged
Slower the streams that ripple to the sea,
There is but sadness in the coming home.

When childish laughter is for ever stilled
And childish tears by touch of Time are dried,
When vacant chairs that never can be filled
Give bitter welcome to the old fireside,
There is but sadness in the coming home.

O exiled Lives, with the dead days entwined,
O exiled Hearts, aweary while ye roam,
Earth has no keener pain than this—to find
Your crown of sorrow in the coming home.

THE WALLABY TRACK

O a weird, wild road is the Wallaby Track
That is known to the bushmen only,
Stretching away to the plains out back
And the big scrubs lorn and lonely!
Dawn till dark they are passing there,
Over the hot sand thronging,
Shouldering burdens of Doubt and Despair,
Passion and Love and Longing.

There are pearls of dew on the Wallaby Track
For the maiden Day's adorning,
And blush-clouds beating the night-shades back
In the van of the golden morning;
There are glories born of the sinking sun
In the splendid Eve's lap dying,
A glitter of stars lit one by one,
And a rustle of night-wings flying.

There are long bright days on the Wallaby Track
  With a blue vault arching over,
And long, long thoughts that are drifting back
  To the waiting wife and lover;
There are horse-bells tinkling down the wind
  With a thousand rippling changes,
And the boom of the team-bells intertwined
  From the far-off mulga ranges.

There are stars of gold on the Wallaby Track,
  And silver the moonbeams glisten;
The great Bush sings to us, out and back,
  And we lie in her arms and listen;
Our dull hearts quicken their rhythmic beat
  For a wild swan's southward flying,
And gather old memories sadly sweet
  From a wind-swept pine-bough's sighing.

There are lone graves left on the Wallaby Track,
  And the bush-grass bends above them;
They had no white hands to wave them back,
  Perhaps—no hearts to love them!
But none the less will their sleep be sound
  For the Hope and the Love denied them,
Or the ceaseless tramp on the thirsty ground
  Till all men sleep beside them.

BEYOND THE BARRIER

Are you tired of the South Land, comrade—
  Of the smoke and the city's din,
And the roar of the chiding ocean
  When the sobbing tide comes in?
Would you ride to the Northward, rather,
  To the skirmish posts of Earth,
Where the darkest dust-storms gather
  And the wildest floods have birth?
Are you tired of the long days idle—
  The days you would fling behind
For the clasp of the tugging bridle,
  The kiss of the racing wind,
Where the best camp-horse that ever drew
  A hoof-slide on the plain,
Is waiting by the creek for you
  Beyond the Barrier Chain?

Are you tired of the revel, comrade—
The life of folly and wine,
With its one-half lived in the shadow
And one-half lived in the shine?
Are you tired of the poison-glasses,
The lawless love and the kiss?
Out East where the brown range passes
Do you hope for dearer than this—
For a handkerchief waved in greeting
Far off, where it waved farewell,
For the joy of a dreamed-of meeting
And the glow of an old love-spell,
Where the sweetest maid that ever knew
Love's bliss or parting's pain
Is waiting open-armed for you
Beyond the Barrier Chain?

Let us steer to the Northward, comrades!
To the Bush with her witching spells;
To the sun-bright days and the camp-fire blaze
And the chime of the bullock bells!
Down the long, long leagues behind us
The rain shall cover our track,
And the dust of the North shall blind us
Or ever we follow it back.

Away from the old friends, comrades!
  The grasp of the strong brown hand!
The love and the life and the laughter
  That brighten the brave North Land!
So long as the sunlight fills it,
  So long as the white moons shine,
So long as the Master wills it,
  The North is your home and mine!

RAINBOWS AND WITCHES

I REMEMBER, ever so long ago,
At the other side of the world away
When rain would cease on an April day,
When the mountain mists would roll and rise
And the rainbow ride in the purple skies—
How they would say to us, "Run, dear heart,
Out where you see the bright bow start,
And there you will gather a heap of gold
As much as ever your hands can hold;
Out of the wood and beyond the gate,
Run for your fortune or you'll be late!"
How we would run! I remember still
The dangerous dash down the garden hill;
And many a stumble and many a slip,
Our eager eyes on the rainbow-dip;

Limbs aweary but never a rest,
Beating hearts on the hopeless quest—
For the further we raced the further passed
The rainbow goal, till we tired at last.

O golden years ye are past and gone
With the far-off flash of a distant dream;
But still we are striving and struggling on,
Chasing the gold and the rainbow gleam!

I remember, ever so long ago,
At the other side of the world away
As we in our tiny white cots lay
Half in slumber and half-awake,
Watching the nesting swallow take
(A moving shade on the blind so white)
His last trip home to his nest at night—
How they would say at our bedside: "Soon,
Dear little heart, the great red moon
Will climb the sky to her fleecy seat,
Stars at her shoulder and stars at her feet:
And if you should wake to-night, dear heart,
When the night and morning meet and part,
And open your window ever so wide,
You'll see where the brave broom-witches ride

Low to the fir-tops and high to the moon
With their peaky hats and their pointed shoon,
And first of them all your lover so fair,
The moon-wind tossing her red-gold hair!"

Our childish hopes they are dead lang syne,
But I wait at night with my window wide,
And many a lonely watch is mine
To see my love when the witches ride!

HANDICAPPED!

"*Maybe Fate's weight-cloths are breaking his heart.*"
—Rudyard Kipling.

Life's race for all is even-lapped
To watching eyes it seems;
But how we may be handicapped
The wide world never dreams.
Ah! well for those whose lot is cast
Where open war demands;
But brave men fighting down the Past
Are fighting with chained hands.

The girls who loved us long ago,
Whose love has changed to scorn,
Will watching think, "How weak and slow!"
But never, "How forlorn!"

Yet by the bitterness of Fate
  The night we chose to part,
It was their soft hands laid the weight
  Above our throbbing heart.

The memory of dark deeds done
  That blot a family page;
The father leaving to his son
  Sin's ghastly heritage;
The treason of a friend untrue,
  The wild dreams better dead,
The hopes 't is madness to renew—
  These are our weights of lead.

Life's race for all is even-lapped
  To watching eyes it seems;
But how we may be handicapped
  The wide world never dreams.
Remember, when you cheer the best,
  It was no equal start,
And some who toil behind the rest
  Have leaden weights at heart!

MEMORY TOWN

From dawning to dusk moves the crowd in her street
With eyes looking upward, quick pulses that beat.

And slow feet that loiter, and dumb lips that call
Where sunshine and shadow are crossed for them all.

In mystic mosaic her pavements are set:
A stone for Sweet Thoughts, then a stone for Regret.

The walls of her houses are handsome and high,
Whose balconies break the blue line of the sky.

On one side the sun fires the columns with light,
On one side the shadow lies blacker than night.

On one side Youth's Joys from their windows look down
To watch the wayfarers in Memory Town.

They laugh with low music that each understands,
And wave their white 'kerchiefs and kiss their white hands.

They fling their gay garlands, white roses and red;
But Care gallops past us and tramples them dead.

On the other side stand the Gray Griefs of the years
The hands on the railings are wet with their tears.

With sad eyes and wistful they lean and look down
On the lone hearts that loiter in Memory Town.

They bind no white garland, and weave no red wreath,
But strew the dark cypress that whispers of Death.

So sunlight and shadow are crossed in the crown
That the old years have wrought us in Memory Town

TO A BUNCH OF HEATHER

WAS it early in the autumn, was it sunny summer weather?
Were the white mists on the Carter when they plucked you on the moor?
Were the mountain dews upon you in the morning, Sprig of Heather,
When they took you from your sisters for the long lone Southern tour?

Did you hide from those who sought you? Did you think the white hand cruel
That could choose you from a thousand as the brightest and the best,
That could bind you as a token, richer far than any jewel,
For a love-word to the Southland from the old home in the west?

Did you hear the Nor' winds singing in the white
sails—you so tightly
Stringed and covered, pressed and withered, little
exile from the blue?
Did you hear the throbbing engines, and the sirens
hooting nightly?
Did you hear the crashing water and the bow-blade
breaking through?

Did you feel the home-love tremble when I took you
in my fingers?
Did you wonder any longer why they plucked you
from the moors?
Did you know you brought the music of a million
wild-bee singers?
Did you guess that for the mountains yearned another
heart than yours?

Did you know that you were laden with a lost year's
joy and sorrow?
Did you know that you were royal with the rainbow
and the rain?
Lying—oh! so worn and withered—in my brown
hand, did you borrow
For a moment from the touching all I felt of pride—
and pain?

You are fading, little love-word, as the morning stars
are paling:
Will it bring you back the purple of the hill-side
where you grew
If I lay you in the window? Can it be like me
you're ailing
For a sight of mountain moorland, little exile from
the blue?

THE FRONT RANK

We fight on far tracks unknown;
We ride the way of the rover,
Each with a line of his own;
Our banner the blue sky over,
Our bugle the bushwind's tone.

We charge where no red squares kneel,
We ride with no helmets glitt'ring,
We carry no gleaming steel;
But our reins are foam to the bit-ring,
Our spurs are red to the heel.

We war by the watching stars,
No women look to our wounded,
No white hands bandage our scars:
For us no medals are rounded –
No ribbons or clasps or bars.

Swordless and swift we go ;
Our brown arms bared to the slaughter
Our hearts with the quest aglow ;
We battle and ask no quarter,
Our faces turned to the foe.

At last in the smoke of the years
Far from where camp and tent lie,
From clashing of shields and spears.
We slip to the earth so gently
That scarcely a comrade hears.

We slip to the earth and lie
Clay cold in the golden grasses,
White faces turned to the sky ;
And the last of our longings passes,
The last of our dreams goes by.

But the drums beat, year to year,
And men from the wings close round us,
And men ride up from the rear
To win—where no smile has crowned us,
Or lose—where it costs no tear !

THE NEW MOON

"New Moon to-night!" you will hear them say,
Turning their eyes to the glint of gold;
But this, as you know, is their quaint little way—
For the Moon she is centuries old!

She swings like a boat in the darkening sky,
A boat that is gilded from stem to stern,
And "Turn your money!" the old wives cry—
But every moon we have less to turn!

Yet saint and sinner and baron and boor,
In log-built cabin or marble hall,
Happy go-lucky and rich and poor—
The brave little Moon has a smile for all.

Her cargo has listed astern, this trip,
And her bows are above the foam,
But she ploughs away down in the mists, a ship
That is eager enough for home.

Alone in the drift of the leagueless heights
  Her course to the west she steers,
Rail-high with the lore of a million nights
  And the legends of all the years.

"New Moon to-night!" so the people say;
  But the winds that cross her and croon
They have sung in her silvery sails all day,
  And they know her the old, old Moon.

And the pine trees listen and toss their heads
  And laugh in a splendid scorn,
For the old Moon sailed by their cradle-beds
  Before the speakers were born.

"New Moon to-night!" So the people say,
  Lifting their eyes to the curve of gold;
But this, as you know, is their quaint little way—
  For the Moon she is centuries old!

THE BUSH, MY LOVER

THE camp-fire gleams resistance
To every twinkling star;
The horse-bells in the distance
Are jangling faint and far;
Through gum-boughs lorn and lonely
The passing breezes sigh;
In all the world are only
My star-crowned Love and I.

The still night wraps Macquarie;
The white moon, drifting slow,
Takes back her silver glory
From watching waves below;
To dalliance I give over
Though half the world may chide,
And clasp my one true Lover
Here on Macquarie side.

The loves of earth grow olden
Or kneel at some new shrine;
Her locks are always golden—
This brave Bush-Love of mine;
And for her star-lit beauty,
And for her dawns dew-pearled,
Her name in love and duty
I guard against the world.

They curse her desert places!
How can they understand
Who know not what her face is
And never held her hand?—
Who may have heard the meeting
Of boughs the wind has stirred,
Yet missed the whispered greeting
Our listening hearts have heard

For some have travelled over
The long miles at her side,
Yet claimed her not as Lover
Nor thought of her as Bride:
And some have followed after
Through sun and mist for years,
Nor held the sunshine laughter,
Nor guessed the raindrops tears.

If we some white arms' folding,
Some warm, red mouth should miss—
Her hand is ours for holding,
Her lips are ours to kiss ;
And closer than a lover
She shares our lightest breath,
And droops her great wings over
To shield us to the death.

And if her droughts are bitter,
Her dancing mirage vain—
Are all things gold that glitter ?
What pleasure but hath pain !
And since among Love's blisses
Love's penalties must live,
Shall we not take her kisses
And, taking them, forgive ?

The winds of Dawn are roving
The river-oaks astir . . .
What heart were lorn of loving
That had no Love but her ?
Till last red stars are lighted
And last winds wander West,
Her troth and mine are plighted—
The lover I love best !

A SPIN OF THE COIN

The Spring is warm and waking, and the wattle's bursting bud;
And the longing of the rover makes a fever in the blood;
The grass is growing swiftly in the sheltered river bends,
And the Bush, our old coy lover, waits to kiss us and make friends;
And the yearning is upon us to be somewhere and away,
If it's but to tilt at windmills, as a careless Quixote may.

And since it matters little if we ride to North or South,
To the reeling desert dust-showers or the rocking harbour mouth,

Let's toss our last half-sovereign—and the spinning
coin shall say:
If it's heads, we start to-morrow; if it's tails, we start
to-day;
And heads shall be for Sydney Heads, fair wind and
ocean tide,
And tails for tailing weaners on the Diamantina
side!

For Spring is close and coming: you can hear her
rustling wings
And her thousand-throated murmur—never music
like the Spring's!
Her hand is in the rover's and her lips to his are
pressed;
She is all a-fire and eager, and she will not let us
rest
Till our hand's upon the bridle and our foot's upon
the bar,
And our face is to the freedom of the storm-wind and
the star!

Long luck to every rover—to the west of Sydney
side,
With the blue Sea for a lover or the brown Bush for
a bride!

If they mount with merry laughter, may they never
taste of woe!
If they take the track in sorrow, may they gladden as
they go!
There's a free lance down the Lachlan with their
roving ranks will join
At the bidding of the Springtide and the spinning of
a coin!

A DREAMER OF DREAMS

THE song-thrush loves the laurel,
The stone chat haunts the broom,
But the seagull must have room
Where the white drift spins ashore
And the winds and waters quarrel
With the old hate evermore.

You clear with scythe or sabre
A pathway for your feet,
I move in meadow sweet
By the side of silent streams,
And you are lord of labour
And I am serf of dreams.

You fill the red wine flagon
And drink and ride away
To the toil of each new day,
But I quaff till dawn be pale
To the knight or dame or dragon
Of a dream-spun fairy tale.

You win your chosen maiden
With a bracelet for her wrist;
Lightly courted, lightly kissed,
She is yours for weal or woe,
But my heart goes sorrow-laden
For a dream-love long ago.

Let our pathways part for ever
I am all content with mine—
For when lips are tired of wine
As the long-dead dreamers tell,
There are poppies by the river,
There is hemlock in the dell.

THE GRAVES OUT WEST

If the lonely graves are scattered in that fenceless
vast God's Acre,
If no church bells chime across them, and no mourners
tread between—
Yet the souls of those sound sleepers go as swiftly to
their Maker,
And the ground is just as sacred, and the graves are
just as green.

If we chant no solemn dirges to the virtue of their
living,
If we sing no hymn words o'er them—in the glory of
the stars
They can hear a grander music than was ever ours for
giving,
God's choristers invisible—the winds in the belars

If we set them up no marble, it is none the less we
love them:
If we carved a million columns would it bring them
better rest?
If no gentle hands have fashioned snow-white wreaths
to lay above them,
God has laid His own wild flowers on the lonely
graves out West.

FAIRY TALES

I CHANCED on an old brown book to-day
All stained and yellow with dust and age,
But the beats of a boy's heart, stilled for aye,
Are heard at the turning of every page.

For the old brown book was the day's desire
When sweet princesses and knights in mail
And guardian dragons with tongues of fire
Were marshalled to fashion a fairy tale.

I laughed at the little Tin Soldier then,
And cried for the Maiden with Heart Ice-cold;
But now they are different, maids and men,
And the lustre is gone from their garb of gold.

I am reading to-day as a man may read,
By no spell bidden or charm beguiled;
For the gem is a pebble, the flower a weed,
Till it wake to worth in the heart of a child.

I turn the pages ; the old loves pass,
But I dream in their dear delight no more ;
I watched them once through a rose-hued glass,
I am standing now at an oaken door.

I put them aside with a sigh, a frown,
For the folk seem foolish, the wonders tame,
And I understand as I lay them down
That the stories can never be quite the same.

But I'd give the worth of the books I've read,
The books of the world with their wondrous lore,
Just to go back to the days long dead
With a heart for a fairy tale once more !

VILLANELLE

Last night in Memory's boughs aswing,
  When none but I had heart to hear,
A wee brown mavis tried to sing.

But, ah! the wild notes would not ring
  As once they rang—so loud and clear!
Last night in Memory's boughs aswing.

I saw the rowan-clusters cling,
  And far away and yet so near
A wee brown mavis tried to sing.

Almost I found a long lost Spring,
  Almost the loves I held so dear,
Last night in Memory's boughs aswing.

For joys that had their blossoming
  Beyond the grief of each gray year
A wee brown mavis tried to sing;

But the dew wrapped him, glistening,
  And every dew-drop told a tear
Last night in Memory's boughs aswing,

While, throbbing heart and drooping wing,
  And chill claws grasping at his bier,
A wee brown mavis tried to sing.

But I shall know when hailstorms sting,
  And not forget when leaves are sere,
Last night in Memory's boughs aswing
  A wee brown mavis tried to sing.

BEN HALL'S STIRRUP-IRONS

A LITHE young squatter passes in the dust,
His buckles gleaming and his bars aglance;
But laden with long years of old romance
The quaint old stirrups covered with red rust!
The troops are scattered and the dark days dead
When robber bands made wild the Lachlan side;
No hunted outlaws to the mountains ride,
A thousand pounds of blood-fee on their head:
And only these quaint stirrups hand us down
The thrilling story no one halts to hear
Of long wild rides below the trusted stars,
And that last mournful journey to the town—
The lifeless form bound to the saddle-gear,
The blood-drops falling on the stirrup-bars.

BALLADE OF WINDY NIGHTS

Have you learnt the sorrow of windy nights
When lilacs down in the garden moan,
And stars are flickering faint, wan lights,
And voices whisper in wood and stone?
When steps on the stairway creak and groan,
And shadowy ghosts take an hour of ease
In dim-lit galleries all their own?
Do you know the sorrow of nights like these?

Have you lain awake on the windy nights
Slighted by sleep and to rest unknown,
When keen remorse is a whip that smites
With every gust on the window blown?
When phantom Love from a broken throne
Steps down through the Night's torn tapestries,
Sad eyed and wistful, and ah! so lone . . .
Do you know the sorrow of nights like these?

Have you felt a touch on the windy nights—
The touch of a hand not flesh nor bone,
But a mystical something, pale, that plights
With waning stars and with dead stars strown?
Or heard grey lips with the fire all flown
Pleading again in a lull o' the breeze—
A long life's wreck in a short hour shown?
Do you know the sorrow of nights like these?

Ah, the whirlwind reaped where a wind is sown,
And the phantom Love in the night one sees!
Ah, the touching hand and the pleading tone!
Do you know the sorrow of nights like these?

THE BUSHMAN'S FRIEND

Let the sailor tell of the roaring gale
  Or the blue waves' rippling laughter,
Let the soldier sing of the sabre swing
  Or the laurels of glory after ;
There's a melody in the changeful sea,
  There's a charm in the battle thunder,
But sweeter than those, the bushman knows,
  Is the bound of a good horse under.

You can hear his feet on the sandhill beat
  That the dew of the morning lies on,
As he strides away at the dawn of day
  Ere the sun has topped the horizon ;
You can hear them pass through the rustling grass
  With a beautiful rhythmic measure,
As he pulls at the rein on the open plain
  With a share in his master's pleasure.

You can feel him fight for a faster flight
  With an eagerness never grown idle,
As you firmly sit with a hold of the bit
  And a strong hand on the bridle ;
You can feel him creep, then plunge with a leap
  Like the forward drive of a shallop
When she carves the stream with a gust abeam,
  As he changes step in the gallop.

You can tell by his ears that the hoofs he hears
  Of the brumbies that cross from the river :
How the foam-flakes flit as he mouths the bit !
  How the beautiful nostrils quiver !
How he rears and bounds at the nearer sounds
  As the mob goes thundering by him !
How he'd lay to his speed and challenge the lead
  If his master would only try him !

Let this one stand where the sails are fanned
  By a favouring breeze behind him ;
Let that one sip at the cannon's lip
  Such joys as the battle can find him ;
This moral to each I'll venture to teach,
  Though loth in life's journey to guide him—
A man may have worse than an honest horse
  And the health and the heart to ride him !

THE CITY OF GRAY GRIEFS

Somewhere, hid in our hearts, a City stands
Gray-mossed with all the sorrow of the years,
And broken-arched with Love's unclasping hands
And mortared stone to stone with bitter tears.

Here at each corner of the silent streets,
By every fountain in the empty squares,
Each one of us his stifled Sorrow meets
Beneath the mouldering arches, unawares.

From dawn till day death, white beneath the sun,
Hand in cold hand go past our sheeted dead,
Pale with regret for deeds of ours undone,
Weary with longing for our words unsaid.

Here the dim Sins held close in buried days,
With the loud sandals of Remembrance shod,
Make hollow echo on the grass grown ways,
Calling the vengeance of an unknown God.

Here the lost chances of a ruined life
  From shrivelled lips let loose a mocking tongue,
Or turn and stab with a relentless knife
  The souls that scorned them when the world was young.

Here the hot kisses of a cruel love,
  The lustful kisses, burn like heated brands;
Here is no rest; no Lethe to remove
  The snowy fetters of the clinging hands.

Fades the red sun from minaret and dome
  Night after weeping night; and still beneath
The gray-grown Griefs in long procession come,
  Death's messengers without the peace of Death.

CHRISTMAS NIGHT

The lamps will be lit over seas to-night,
And the feast of the year be spread,
And the girls will gather with faces bright
And the wine will sparkle red ;
And hands will close on the glass's stem,
And over the Christmas cheer
The boys will be drinking "Long life to them !"
On the happiest day of the year.
And spite of the sorrow that hides for shame
In the brown locks streaked with gray,
Though a father may frown at a whispered name
Yet a mother will have her way ;
For a son's disgrace is a sword to smite,
But Time is a balm to heal,
And in many a home in the North to-night
They will drink to their ne'er-do-weel.

LIBRARY.

The township streets will be full to-night
With the bushmen from far and near
Who have ridden to share in the wild delight
Of the merriest day in the year;
And men will come from the dusty street
And stand at the crowded bar,
And maybe a memory soft and sweet
Will float to some heart from far—
A flashing of lights in a lordly home,
And a glitter of lifted hands
As they drink to the health of the boys who roam
In those different distant lands.
And there in the midst of a noisy host,
In a sorrow that none can feel,
Will be fashioned, it may be, a silent toast
In the heart of some ne'er do-weel.

THE CRUELLEST DREAM

So here at the last I find
  I am holding again your hand,
And why you are cruel no more, but kind,
  I scarcely can understand ;
But I know that the earth is ablaze with roses,
  I know that the lilies make paths for our feet,
And as long as your hand on my own hand closes
  I know that you love me, sweet !

I hear as of old your voice
  That is speaking my name so low, so low,
Till all things living rejoice
  And all things gladden that grow ;
And I know that the skies are a dazzling blue
  And the face of the earth is fair,
And I know that the birds are calling you true
  In songs that are everywhere.

I am kissing you over and over,
  I am holding you close to my heart,
As of old we are lover and lover
  And live in a world apart . . .
I hear no longer your sweet voice calling,
  But only the wail of the wind instead;
I have lost your face in the shadows falling—
  Darling! the cruellest dream is dead.

BOWMONT WATER

O, WE think we're happy roving!
But the stars that crown the night,
They are only ours for loving
When the moon is lost to sight!
And my hopes are fleeting forward
With the ships that sail the sea,
And my eyes are to the Nor'ward
As an exile's well may be,
And my heart a shrine has sought her
Where the lights and shadows play,
At the foot of Bowmont Water,
Bowmont Water—far away!

O, it's fair in summer weather
When the red sun dropping low
Sets a lustre on the heather
And the Cheviot peaks aglow;

When the hares come down the meadows
  In the gloaming clear and still,
And the flirting lights and shadows
  Play at hidies on the hill;
When the wild duck's mate has sought her
  And the speckled hill-trout play
At the foot of Bowmont Water,
 Bowmont Water—far away!

O, it's grand when Winter's creeping
  And the rime is on the trees,
And the giant hills are sleeping
  With the gray clouds on their knees;
When the autumn days are ended
  And the glens are deep with snow,
And the grips are dark and splendid
  Where the mountain eagles go:
Then the strath is a king's daughter,
  In her purple robes and gray,
At the foot of Bowmont Water,
 Bowmont Water—far away!

We have wandered down the valley
  In the days of buried time,
Seen the foxgloves dip and dally,
  Heard the fairy blue-bells chime;

Seen the brier roses quiver
  When the West-wind crossed the dell,
Heard the music of the river
  And the tale it had to tell,
Where the melody Love taught her
  Is the laverock's only lay,
At the foot of Bowmont Water,
  Bowmont Water—far away !

I have tried the spots, in order,
  Where the brightest sunbeams fall,
But the land upon the Border
  Is my own land after all,
And I would not take the glory
  Of the whole world's golden sheen
For the white mists down the corrie
  And the naked scaurs between ;
And my heart a shrine has sought her
  That will last her little day—
At the foot of Bowmont Water,
  Bowmont Water—far away !

THE ROSE OUT OF REACH

A RED rose grew on a southward wall,
There was never a rose on the tree so tall;
Though roses twined at my lingering feet
Roses and roses, scented sweet,
And roses bent to my love-lit eyes,
Roses flaming in wanton guise,
And roses swung at my shoulder height,
Damask and crimson and golden and white,
With a curse for all and a frown for each
I longed for the rose beyond my reach.

The gold sun shone in the summer days,
The wee buds opened a hundred ways;
Winds of the morning, whispering sweet,
Tossed the blown roses down at my feet,
Dainty petals for lover's tread,
Ruby and ivory—brown and dead!

But morning to nooning, noon to night,
One rose only glowed in my sight—
Silently, all too rapt for speech,
I worshipped the rose beyond my reach.

I stormed her tower on the southward wall
To drop fatigued from the bastions tall;
Thorns made sport of me, red as the rose
A hundred wounds ran blood at their blows;
The soft little roses red and white
Changed to the bitterest foes in spite,
Scourged my face with their stinging wands,
Mocked my toil and my bleeding hands
Till I learned at last what they strove to teach:
The great red rose was beyond my reach.

And so I watched in the autumn days:
"Summer is dead," so I mused agaze;
"The cold mists creep when the night is nigh,
Day after day the roses die,
Storms of winter will gather soon,
Frosts will follow the coming moon—
Here if I wait where the blooms are cast
My love will drop to my arms at last!" . .
But wild winds laden with death for each
Blew the red petals beyond my reach.

“SORRY TO GO!

I watched by the homestead where moon-beam and star
Made a glory of night-time and danced with the dew,
And the bush-wind that whispered from ranges afar
Set a-tremble the kurrajong leaves as it blew :
And down by the river,
With white waves aflow,
I bade a farewell to the homestead for ever,
And sighed to the night-world, “I'm sorry to go,”
“Sorry to go”—
And echo came answering, “Sorry to go!”

I saddled old Dauntless at grey of the dawn
For a last swinging gallop on Moondarra plain ;
He circled and plunged till the girth-straps were drawn,
And snatched at the snaffle and reached at the rein ;

And swiftly behind us
We left the red glow
Of the sunrise that spread her pink mantle to wind us,
And magpies awaking sang, "Sorry to go,"
"*Sorry to go!*"—
The bush-birds came mocking me, "Sorry to go!"

I called to my lover, a chain from her gate;
She came to the vine-tree to bid me good-bye,
With white arms to weave me a necklet of state
And red lips to smother the sound of a sigh;
Oh, kisses rained warmly!
Oh, tears that must flow!
To-morrow the sorrow where head and white arm lie,
To-night the low whisper—"I'm sorry to go,"
"*Sorry to go!*"—
Heart to heart answering, "Sorry to go!'

I held for a moment an old comrade's hand
Burnt brown with the sun-fire and roughened and scarred;
I saw at the touching the whips and the brand,
The camp and the muster, the steers in the yard;

And since I have clasped them
In weal and in woe,
To the toil of the world that has roughened and rasped them
I leave the brown hands; crying "Sorry to go,"
"Sorry to go"—
"Good-bye!" and "God-speed!" and . . .
"Sorry to go!"

THE LAND OF DUMB DESPAIR

In Memoriam: Barcroft Boake.

Beyond where farthest drought-fires burn,
By hand of Fate it once befell,
I reached the realm of No-Return
That meets the march of Hell.

A silence crueller than Death
Laid fetters on the fateful air;
She holds no hope: she fights for breath,
The Land of Dumb Despair!

Here fill their glasses, red as blood,
The victims of fell Fortune's frown;
They drink their wine as brave men should
And fling the goblets down.

They crowd the board, red wreaths of rose
Across their foreheads drooped and curled,
But in their eyes the gloom that knows
The grief of all the world.

The poison lies behind their wine
  So close, the trembling hands that take
Might well be doubted to divine
  Which draught such thirst would slake.

The bows beside their hands are strung ;
  The blue steel glitters, bare of sheath ;
'Tis wonder tired Life drags among
  So many ways to Death !

They may not whisper, one to one,
  The stories of their fancied fall :
The words that ring beneath the sun
  Would faint in such a pall.

In silence, man by man, they reach
  For cup, for arrow, or for sword,
And still the grey World fills the breach
  Each leaves beside the board.

L'ENVOI

TO THE OVERLANDERS

TAKE this farewell from one must leave
  The rowel and the rein
Before the blue Canoblas weave
  Their snow-white hoods again;
Before the winter suns have kissed
  The lips of Autumn dead,
Before they call the next year's list
  At Nocoleche shed;
Before the pines on Lightning Ridge
  Have bowed to six new moons,
Before the floods to Tarrion Bridge
  Back up the dry lagoons.
In vain the luring West-wind sighs —
  For Home's across the sea,
And Northward round the Leuwin lies
  The next long trip for me!

In leisure and in labour
We've faced the world afield,
With saddle for a sabre
And brave heart for a shield;
We've fought the long dry weather,
We've heard the wild floods wake,
We've battled through together
For the old game's royal sake.

We have heard the tug-chains ring in the swamps
When the thundering whipstrokes fall;
We have watched the stars on the droving camps
Come out by the gum-trees tall;
We have lingered long by the low slip-rails
Where maybe a light love waits,
When shadows creep and the red sun sails
Low down by the stockyard gates;
We have stirred perhaps by the lone watch-fires
The ashes of old regret,
The loves unwon and the lost desires,
And the hopes that are hard to forget.

The tracks we've travelled over
Were hungry tracks and hard;
Long days we've played the rover,
Dark nights we've kept our guard;

But chained in silver glories
The Bush our hearts has stirred,
And told the starlight stories
That no one else has heard.

The gray-white dawns will wake you and the gold noons watch you pass
Behind the roving Queensland mobs knee-deep in Nebine grass;
You will cross the old tracks Nor'ward, you will run the old roads West,
And I shall follow with my heart dream-droving with the rest,
And often in the sleepless nights I'll listen, as I lie,
To the hobble-chains clink-clinking, and the horse-bells rippling by.
I shall hear the brave hoofs beating, I shall see the moving steers
And the red glow of the camp-fires as they flame across the years,
And my heart will fill with longing just to ride for once again
In the forefront of the battle where the men who fight are Men;

And when beyond the Ocean we are pledging toasts in wine,
I shall give "The Overlanders!" in that far-off land of mine.

The Brave West! Here's toward her!
The "plant's" gone out before:
Their heads are to the Border
But I'll go out no more;
We've fought the long dry weather;
We've faced the blinding wet;
And we were mates together
And I shall not forget!

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